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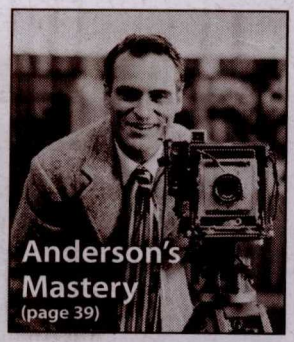

Abolition Now

The need to abandon fossil fuels is more urgent than e

SEE J. A. MYERSON, PAGE 12

ALSO INSIDE

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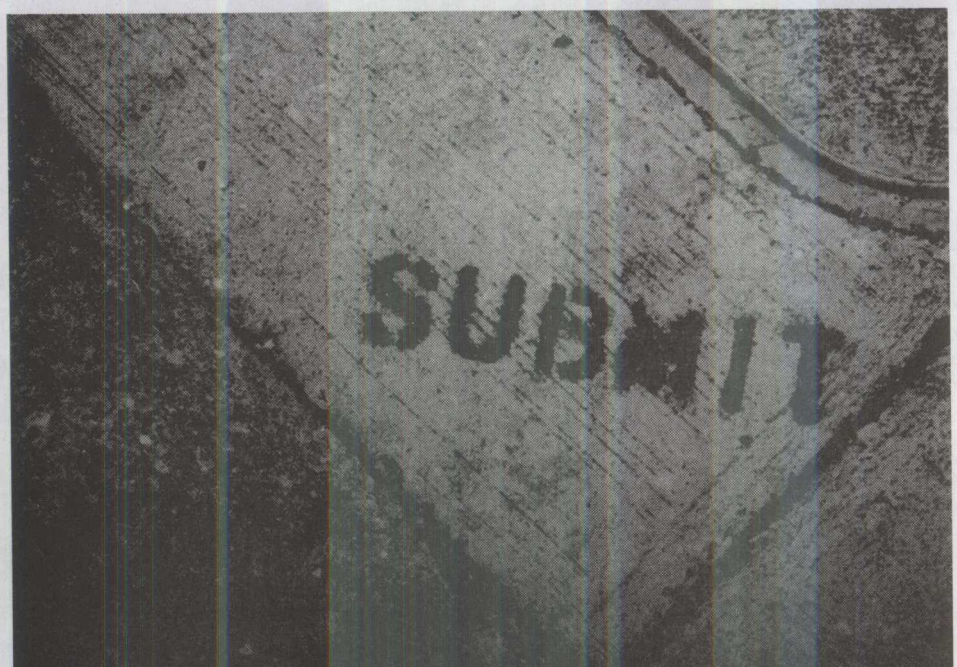

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The *GC Advocate* newspaper, the only newspaper dedicated to the needs and interests of the CUNY Graduate Center community, is looking for new writers for the 2012-2013 academic year. We publish six issues per year and reach thousands of Graduate Center students, faculty, staff, and guests each month.

Currently we are seeking contributors for the following articles and columns:

- Investigative articles covering CUNY news and issues (assignments available on request)
- First Person essays on teaching at CUNY for our regular "Dispatches from the Front" column
- First person essays on life as a graduate student for our "Graduate Life" column
- Feature "magazine style" articles on the arts, politics, culture, NYC, etc.
- Provocative and insightful analyses of international, national, and local politics for our Political Analysis column
- Book reviews for our regular Book Review column and special Book Review issues
- Local Music Reviews and Art Reviews

To view recent articles and to get a sense of our style, please visit the *GC Advocate* website: www.gcadvocate.com.

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Interested writers should contact Editor Michael Busch at **michaelkbusch@gmail.com**.

FROM THE editor's desk

Lessons from November

Hope and change finally arrived in the United States this month, however late and unexpected. And no, I don't mean Barack Obama's reelection. Putting aside for the moment the president's victory over the hapless and horrendous Mitt Romney, the 2012 election offered a resounding rejection of the modern Republican political agenda, itself built on a foundation of misogyny, racism, homophobia, and the spurning of science and basic human welfare. We should be heartened and thankful.

Even the far right is acknowledging the changed social terrain of American politics. Speaking with the *New York Times* just after the election, R. Albert Mohler, Jr.—president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, KY—noted, in a remarkable moment of candor that "Millions of American evangelicals are absolutely shocked by not just the presidential election, but by the entire avalanche of results that came in. It's not that our message—we think abortion is wrong, we think same-sex marriage is wrong—didn't get out. It did get out. It's that the entire moral landscape has changed," he said. "An increasingly secularized America understands our positions, and has rejected them."

Let's be clear, however. The progressive victories of Election Day—increased numbers of women in the Senate, the defeat of troglodytes like Todd Aiken, gay marriage in more states, and drug legalization in Colorado—in no way suggest that we can expect a second term Obama presidency to govern from the left. Far from it. While Mr. Romney and the president may disagree on matters of social policy, Democrats and Republicans seemed to have reached consensus on deeply conservative economic and foreign policy agendas. Regrettably, mainstream liberals seem to have ceded this territory entirely to conservatives, preferring to treat politics purely as an electoral game of poll numbers and predictions enjoyed from the comfort of home rather than doing the heavy-lifting of understanding why the status quo has failed so miserably for so many and fighting for real change in the broader community.

Thus, left to its own devices, the Obama administration will continue to advance the interests of neoliberal economics (described beautifully in the Greek context by Kristofer Petersen-Overton in this issue and the last), on the one hand, and a foreign policy that sustains and extends the very worst holdovers from the George W. Bush era, on the other. To wit, just hours after securing his reelection, President Obama ordered drone strikes against suspected Al Qaeda militants in Yemen, extrajudicial attacks that left an unspecified number of people dead and injured. Of course, it goes without saying that the Obama administration can hardly expect to avoid political harrying in its second term—there's still the lunatic congressional House to contend with for at least the next two years.

Nevertheless, and despite what will undoubtedly be unrelenting pressure from the right, it's equally important to acknowledge that space has begun to open up that could force elected officials and others within government institutions to govern *to* the left. The president nodded in this direction himself in the speech he delivered after securing reelection in which he signaled openness to progressive reforms on issues of immigration, women's and gay rights, and most surprising of all, global warming (an issue terrifyingly absent in the general election, but the focal point of J.A. Myerson's essay on page 13). For the fact remains: Beyond the welcome news that Americans, or at least the US electorate, is inching toward a better place on social issues as the country matures, the real lesson of this past month has been the reminder that people are more important than money, and that the power of informed, organized citizens still trumps everything else in the United States. Witness Wisconsin and Ohio.

What got largely lost in the orgy of electoral map fetishism driving network and cable coverage of the election Tuesday was the fact that President Obama's victory in states like Ohio and Wisconsin represented less a win for the White House than it did an unambiguous defeat of capital's influence over the ballot box at the hands of organized labor and young people. The endless oodles of cash that creeps like the Koch brothers and Sheldon Adelson poured into battleground states ultimately shriveled in the face of incredibly well-organized union campaigns and unprecedented voter turnout amongst the young. While Karl Rove's American Crossroads, for example, invested money in candidates—running for the House and Senate, as well as the presidency—with only a meager 6 percent return rate of success, union-backed candidates won office 70 percent of the time. And according to the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, swing state electoral outcomes hinged almost entirely on youth voters.

And then there was the hurricane. One of the most immediate political effects of Sandy's devastating landfall in the United States was the stark relief into which the ideological divide in this country was thrown. Suddenly, again, the reality of a world where markets would

be first responders to disaster was clearly presented to the imagination of millions of Americans in the person of Mitt Romney, and by and large the public didn't like what it saw. In times of crisis, Americans were reminded, and despite its myriad problems, the state might not be that bad after all. But Hurricane Sandy also laid bare the incompetence and dysfunction *of* the state. Here at home, the city's response (which included limiting the purview of humanitarian relief organizations) left gaping holes of suffering and need. Seemingly out of nowhere, organized citizen brigades—most notably those spearheaded by Occupy—organically developed and deployed to distressed communities across the city to salve the worst of the damage. The lesson here is simple enough: if government is not able or willing to respond, the organized public can effectively take direct control and care of itself.

So what does all of this have to do with CUNY? Quite a bit, actually. As it turns out, the lessons of the election find analogues in the slow grinding crisis currently facing the CUNY community.

As readers of the *Advocate* are well aware, our university system—like the other public sectors that remain in our society—faces an existential threat from market interests and the neoliberal logic that forms them. The most recent manifestation of this threat has taken shape in Chancellor Matthew Goldstein's Pathways Initiative, a plan that purports to streamline the transfer process for students between junior and senior colleges, and looks to establish a "common core" curriculum that is uniform across the colleges. Without jumping back down the rabbit hole of debate over Pathways, a few observations are in order.

First, as with the nationwide elections at the start of November, it bears repeating that the most potent actor pushing back against the unrepresentative interests of those at the top has been organized labor. From the start, unionized educators in the CUNY system have been the first line of defense against the well-coordinated and occasionally coercive efforts to advance the Pathways initiative on the campuses of the university's junior and senior colleges. Attempts at repelling the chancellor's plan have gained momentum in recent weeks as increasing numbers of departments and other concerned groups (including the DSC) have resolved to resist implementation of the initiative throughout the system. Unsurprisingly, they've been so effective that administrators have resorted to outright authoritarianism in response (as in the case at Queensborough Community College described in detail on pages 5–6), a reaction that both undermines the chancellor's claims to a fully democratic and transparent Pathways process, and one sure to fail in the long run.

Second, and unlike the elections, young people within the CUNY system have yet to mobilize effectively in defiance of the chancellor's plan. This point is crucial. The chancellor's office and its advocates have crafted the Pathways narrative around the central premise that the initiative is in undergraduate students' best interests. This claim is not only untrue, but quickly disposed of upon even cursory examination. And yet it has managed to stick, largely, one assumes, because it has not been brought to the direct attention of CUNY undergraduates. This shortcoming demands immediate remedy if opponents of Pathways hope to prevail. The good news is that undergraduates in the CUNY system are currently better organized and more plugged into university politics than they have been in decades. Thus far, many of the actions taken by undergraduate groups across the system have been centered on tuition hikes and budget cuts, as they should be. The next step is to connect these grievances to the broader agenda of systemic change being engineered by the chancellor and his board of trustees, and to coordinate actions across campuses for maximum impact.

The grassroots response by Occupy and other groups to the devastation of Sandy highlights a third theme that has surfaced recently in the fight against Pathways, namely, that when the institutions of authority cease to operate in the name of those they are designed to serve, we must rebuild new ones that do. This is part of the spirit inspiring the Free University movement—which has challenged the dysfunctions of CUNY and other higher education institutions from the outside—as well as recent steps taken by English faculty members at QCC, which have challenged and reformed things from inside. That the department's move this past week to jettison their chair in favor of more representative leadership was an act of courageous defiance is apparent on its face. Acknowledging that this move offers a new tactic in the broader struggle against Pathways is not as apparent, but no less important. From this point forward, the precedent is set: faculty members in positions of authority can choose to side with their colleagues, or risk that authority by cuddling closer to power, a calculus that potentially reorders the balance of power—however slightly—in favor of those, like Bill Ayers (on page 11), who are interested in education as a Jeffersonian public good and not as a market commodity.

The fight against Pathways is already nasty, and will continue to grow uglier as time progresses. That said, we can take some comfort in reminding ourselves that the comparative advantages enjoyed by CUNY's faculty and students in their fight against Pathways—the power of organized labor, the youth, and a willingness to adopt do-it-yourself approaches to defending public institutions when those institutions have been hijacked—do result in occasional victories—victories that allow us to move onto a new stage in the wider struggle. Ⓐ

Pathways War Escalates at QCC

Since our last issue, the situation at the Queensborough English department has been far from quiet. Rather than accepting the recommendation of vice president Karen Steele to follow Pathways course hour limits, the English faculty decided to continue to offer their English 101 and 102 courses in their current configurations.

The issue was brought before the college's Academic Senate who voted on October 9 to stand in solidarity with the English department faculty's right to determine curriculum for their students. Part of this resolution was the determination that the college will not put itself in a position to lose accreditation or violate state laws by following the course cancellations outlined in Steele's now infamous email. Whether or not the courses follow the Pathways edict, Queensborough faculty will offer the courses their students need. Furthermore, the Academic Senate reaffirmed that all curriculum changes in any department must be made by faculty free from "pressure and constraint," and any decisions made under pressure would be considered as lacking faculty support. The Academic Senate simultaneously took a stand for academic freedom, obligation to students, and shared governance.

Even though the Academic Senate's near-unanimous resolution is a powerful statement, it was merely preliminary compared to the events within the Queensborough English department. The issue of shared governance, as affirmed by the Academic Senate, struck the English department when the English faculty decided to recall their departmental chair, the first instance of this in the college's history.

The Governance Plan of Queensborough Community College, which was ratified by both the college and the CUNY Board of Trustees in 1976, states in its preamble that "The Governance Plan of the College takes precedence over the Bylaws of the Board of Trustees." Thus, when the Governance Plan enables department faculty "to create a provision concerning the recall of the department chairperson" (III, E3), that power to recall a chair cannot be overridden by the board.

On October 24, the full-time English faculty voted to recall Linda Reesman with twenty-one in favor of the recall, seven opposed, and two abstentions. Immediately following this vote, Deputy Chair David Humphries ran without opposition for the chair and was elected with twenty-two yeas, seven nays, and one abstention.

The faculty who supported the recall felt that Linda Reesman did not represent the department's committed resistance to the administration's continued efforts to implement Pathways. This recall had little if nothing to do with Reesman personally or her other duties as chair. The Pathways response trumped all, and the department wanted new leadership as it gears up for the fight over their composition courses. Reesman used Vice President Steele's email verbatim as the agenda for a departmental meeting, with the first agenda item being "reconsider the vote" on Pathways-induced curriculum changes. A faculty member in the department said Reesman "felt that it was wrong of some of us to be standing in the way of this kind of curricular change." Furthermore, the faculty's request

Above: Queensborough President Diane Call.

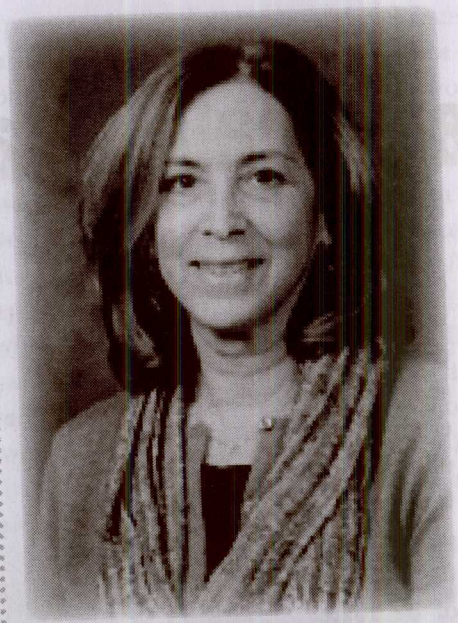
that a union representative be added to the agenda "to educate us about our rights with regard to academic freedom were," according to sources, "unsuccessful." This department meeting was therefore understood by the faculty as a directive to change the departmental vote, and seemed to indicate that the chair was imposing the administration's will rather than defending the faculty and their already ratified decision.

The recall was not unanimous. There was some disagreement within the department about the recall, based on the secretive nature of the petition to recall and the secret ballots for the recall itself. Not all faculty members were approached to sign the petition for recall, and the reasons for recall were not publicly stated on the petition.

The secretive nature of the recall process ties back to Pathways. While the petition for recall only required a majority of full-time faculty, untenured members of the faculty were worried about individual retaliation for their support of the recall. Not an unfounded fear, based on experience with Vice President Steele's original email threatening department closure if faculty didn't accept the administration's curriculum decisions.

For this reason, confidentiality was considered paramount, only the deputy chair and the Faculty Executive Committee would see the completed petition. According to department faculty, the plan was that if Reesman would agree to step down and resign, the petition could just be destroyed and never reviewed by anyone. The sealed petition was delivered to Alexandra Tarasko, the chair of the Faculty Executive Committee, who scheduled and oversaw the recall election by secret ballot.

Sources within the department were pessimistic that the recall would be respected by the administration,



worrying that the president would use the CUNY Board of Trustees by-laws to override the recall and new election. The Board of Trustee's by-laws state: "In any case where the president does not approve the election of a department chairperson, or at such other time as the interests of the college may require the removal of a chairperson and the appointment of a new one, he/she shall confer with the department and thereafter shall report to the board, through the chancellor any subsequent action by the department with respect thereto, together with his/her own recommendation for a chairperson" (IX.2c).

While the by-laws do later state that "designation of the department chairperson should take place only after careful consideration" of the faculty's nominee, the president is not required to accept the department's own choice, according to the Board of Trustees.

At 4:00 p.m. on Friday, October 26—the standard timing for "Take Out the Trash" messages that hope to be buried over the weekend—Queensborough President Diane Call sent out an email to all English full-time, adjunct, substitute, tenured, and tenure-track faculty inviting them to a meeting on October 30, which was then postponed due to Hurricane Sandy until November 6, Election Day.

Around thirty faculty members were able to attend the meeting. President Call began by asking the faculty to speak. This caught the faculty off-guard, since they had not been asked to prepare statements ahead of the meeting, nor did they really know the details the president would discuss. After a few faculty members spoke, President Call addressed the audience. Standing in front of a cheery Election Day reminder scrawled on the whiteboard that read "Don't forget to vote," President Call proceeded to announce that she would not recognize the faculty's election of their new chair, David Humphries. Instead, President Call reinstated the retired former chair Sheena Gillespie to take over the administrative duties of the chair, even though Gillespie had not been eligible to run in the election and is no longer actively employed in the department.

President Call also announced that Vice President Karen Steele would consult on a national search for a new chair. Rather than accepting the vote of the department, Call decided to put the search in the hands of the

Above: Recalled chair Linda Reesman; Prof. David Humphries.

erson who threatened the depart-
ent over the faculty's Pathways
osition. Furthermore, since there
as no department chair—the retired
illespie will only handle admin-
trative duties—all reappointment
nd promotion for untenured faculty
ould go through the college-wide
ersonnel and Budget committee.
aculty would be represented at this
ollege-wide committee by Vice
resident Steele—the same person
ho said all adjuncts would be given
tters of non-reappointment and un-
enured faculty had no guarantee of
ontinued employment in her Path-
ays email would now be in charge
f determining those department
eappointments and promotions.

The reasons President Call gave for
is unprecedented action was that
e department is deeply divided and
eeds to heal and people had told her
at they do not feel safe in the de-
artment, and However, her actions
verriding the department gover-
ance seem to further divide the
epartment and place junior faculty
n more precarious "unsafe" position
irectly represented to Personnel
nd Budget by a vice president who
hreatened to fire the whole depart-
ent.

The president further defended her
ecision by claiming there had been
utside interference in the English
epartment. The extent of this "out-
ide interference" was not addressed
r was the identity of this interfering
arty explained. Department faculty
ad been in consultation with their
nion representatives and other
nglish departments across CUNY
ho are facing similar circumstances,
ut those would hardly be considered
outside interference." President Call
hanked faculty who spoke in pas-
ionate defense of shared governance
nd recognition of the election, but
he did not answer questions or
espond to their concerns, merely re-

QCC English Discipline Council Berates Call Decision

Dear President Call:

We are writing in response to your decision of November 6, 2012 to reject the election of a new chair in the Department of English. The vote of more than two-thirds of the faculty for Professor David Humphries shows remarkable unity given recent challenges facing the department. It is clear your decision is a reprisal for the department's rejection on September 12, 2012 of a course proposal for composition courses that are three hours, three credits. As such, your decision is clearly a punitive departure from norms of academic freedom and departmental self-governance.

Furthermore, your decision to appoint Interim Vice-President Karen Steele as the English Department representative to the college-wide Personnel and Budget Committee is callous at best and intimidating at worst. Vice President Steele will be responsible for presenting English Department candidates for reappointment, promotion, and tenure whom she has threatened to fire because of their previous vote on Pathways composition course proposals. This vote on a departmental curricular matter was consistent with other votes at Queensborough and at many campuses across CUNY which have been met with a similar pattern of threats and reprisals.

We must insist that you retract Vice-President Karen Steele's threats aimed at the department, which included cancelling the vast majority of English courses and terminating the employment of nearly all full-time and part-time English faculty. We must also insist that the English Department vote for chair be honored and that Vice President Steele be removed as the English Department representative to the college-wide Personnel and Budget Committee.

Sincerely yours,

The English Discipline Council

iterating her previous stance that the election must be overturned so that the department could "heal."

Intimidation of untenured faculty over the Pathways initiative continues, with the expressed protection of the Board of Trustee's by-laws and in disregard of faculty governance. Overriding a department's election is an unprecedented action in the history of CUNY and is sure to chill resistance to Pathways, while simultaneously stirring up outrage across the university.

But we must remember that this whole ordeal was imposed on the Queensborough English department faculty because they dared to put their students first. At a school where students speak more than 120 different first languages, the English department added one extra hour to their first year composition classes to provide the additional instruction their students need. Pathways requires that Queensborough cut back on that composition education. Rather than weaken the quality of their students' education, the Queensborough English faculty stood up to the "outside interference" of Pathways and reaffirmed their department's four-hour composition curriculum. Ⓐ

political analysis

Meet the New Obama, More Dangerous Than the Old

ARUN GUPTA

It's a given that elections are about stagecraft—the management of image and perception. Public policy plays a subservient role, crafted for electoral advantage. This maneuvering impelled Obama, less than six months before the election, to suddenly adopt positions he had avoided for three years, such as "deferred action" for unauthorized immigrant youth, his flip-flop on gay marriage and the anti-offshoring "Bring Jobs Home Act."

What's not a given is the permanent electoral state. The day after Obama was re-elected, wags were joking about 2016 front runners and potential candidates like Sen. Marc Rubio were booking tickets to Iowa. The never-ending election cycle means the most the public can hope for is policies that are designed for solidifying partisan advantage might trickle down to help them.

Take immigration, which will be highlight on Obama's second term-agenda, after he punted it during the first. Democrats are salivating at the thought of locking in Latinos for generations to come, and Republicans are panicking after realizing their days are numbered as a party of angry white guys. So there will be action, but nothing as sweeping as Reagan's 1986 immigration amnesty that legalized 2.9 million unauthorized immigrants. In the first place, there are 12 million undocumented immigrants meaning the right could still stoke a racial backlash when the voting public is 72 percent white and African-Americans are as opposed to a "path for citizenship" as white Democrats. More importantly, big business wants an army of labor in the shadows. Legalizing all immigrants would bestow workplace rights now denied to them, make them fertile ground for union organizing and "raise the 'wage floor' for . . . the benefit of both immigrant and native-born workers," according to the Center for American Progress. Obama will likely take the same path as healthcare reform, by opting for a tightly regulated "guest worker" program combined with a narrow path to citizenship along the lines of the Dream Act.

There is more to policy than stagecraft, which was evident after the election. There is the stage on which elections, the theatre of the absurd, are acted out. That stage is neoliberalism, but it cannot be named. So while the public gets a song and dance that lasted two years and cost $6 billion, the real policy happens after the show ends. Think about what the 2012 election will be remembered for. It won't be serious debates about poverty or unemployment or Wall Street regulation, but Big Bird, "binders full of women," and medieval comments on rape.

Yet attention immediately turned to the "fiscal cliff" following the election, while it was studiously ignored during the incessant campaign coverage. In reality, the battle now over the future of social welfare is a phony crisis that Obama himself created over the last four years.

One caveat, policy is deliberately complicated so as to hide the true agenda. Healthcare reform was not designed to provide universal coverage or end medical bankruptcies. The real purpose is to ensure new lines of revenue for insurance, drug, and medical corporations in the form of millions of captive patients—which is why the healthcare industry backed it. The same is true for the looming fiscal cliff (known as sequestration). It's hard to understand because the real agenda—Obama's agenda since before his 2008 election—is to chop up Social Security, Medicaid, and Medicare the way Bill Clinton gutted welfare. Let me explain.

Obama's first public comments after his re-election were about the fiscal cliff created by the Budget Control Act that he rubber-stamped in July 2011. As president, Obama has been at the head of Washington's austerity class. On the eve of his January 2009 inauguration, Obama called for entitlement reform, which means cutting Social Security and Medicare. Then three weeks into his first term, he supported a deficit-reduction commission. In his 2010 State of the Union Address, he backed a three-year freeze spending, mainly on social programs. And since his 2008 campaign, he has surrounded himself with advisers hawking economic quackery.

The budget deal Obama struck in the summer of 2011 mandates $900 billion in "non-defense discretionary spending" cuts. This is wonk-speak for social programs, which will shrivel to 1962 levels of the GDP by 2021. Thus, Obama has completed rolling back the Great Society—a process started under Reagan and accelerated under Clinton. This is even before heading over the fiscal cliff in 2013, when nearly $700 billion in annual tax increases and cuts will kick in.

The fiscal cliff is about rolling back the New Deal.

Now, the cliff can be avoided by bringing in more revenue. So in his post-victory remarks on November 9, Obama called for $4 trillion in "balanced" deficit reduction in which the wealthy share the pain with "students and seniors and middle-class families." What he didn't say is that $3 trillion of that amount is slated for spending cuts. True to form, surrendering when he holds the high ground, in his weekly address the next day Obama said, "We have to combine spending cuts with revenue." Revenue is the Republican position. They are steadfast in demanding the wealthy be spared piddling tax increases but are willing to consider closing "loopholes" such as mortgage interest payments and charitable deductions. In exchange, says Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-South Carolina), the GOP demands "entitlement reform" because "that's where the big money is at."

As Jon Stewart would say, this is straight from "Bullshit Mountain." Economists like Dean Baker and Paul Krugmann have demolished every rationale for deficit reduction under present circumstances: interest rates are so low bondholders are paying the United States to hold their money; reducing the deficit would strangle growth; the best way to reduce the deficit is through growth and inflation; and in any case the plan to hack $4 trillion in a decade is not going to cut the national debt meaningfully.

Even more noxious is Obama's talk of shared sacrifice, which adopts granny-starver Paul Ryan's position. Apparently it needs to be reiterated that Wall Street caused the economic crash in 2008. The banks profited off the criminal subprime bubble. They profited off $4.8 trillion in government bailouts for the financial industry. Now as "too bigger to fail" banks, they continue to profit off implied guarantees. But to pay for the multi-trillion-dollar meltdown means the elderly will have to sacrifice Social Security, the poor healthcare, and students education.

The real goal is to go after Social Security and Medicare. That's the only way to enact $3 trillion in spending cuts. A little history is in order. Obama ran in 2008 on repealing the Bush tax cuts. But he betrayed his promise just one month into his presidency even though he was gushing with political capital, the right was in disarray and the Democratic-controlled Congress was ready to pass it. He mentioned in January 2009 his aim to cut entitlements.

Even more significant, Larry Summers, his chief economic adviser during his first campaign and the Clinton-era architect of the financial bubble that exploded four years ago, laid out Obama's economic policies in the *Financial Times* in September 2008. This article is the Rosetta Stone for Obama's presidency. The *Financial Times* is where the capitalist class speaks openly to each other. The piece was published two weeks after Lehman Brothers collapsed, which set off the financial Pearl Harbor that threatened the global economy.

It is a classic example of the "Shock Doctrine": using the crisis to push for a wholesale economic restructuring. Summers laid out the argument for a fiscal stimulus. But he took pains to mention, "We still must address issues of entitlements and fiscal sustainability." To that he added no "new entitlement programs or exploding tax measures," which includes "healthcare restructuring," but not single payer or universal healthcare. Summers was silent about the financial re-regulation, giving labor more room to organize, or the home mortgage foreclosure crisis that still is the black heart of the rotting economy.

Summers saw that the financial meltdown was the chance to drive a stake through the welfare state. The corporate media plays its role by falsely portraying Social Security as going bankrupt, which Martha Raddatz claimed to be the case during the vice presidential debate, when that is by definition impossible in a pay-as-you-go system. In fact, Social Security is solvent through 2033, and it can be strengthened at any time simply by lifting the payroll tax cap. Medicare is likewise solvent through 2024 at which point the payroll tax will cover 87 percent of projected costs. But Obama—cheered on by liberals—has placed a time bomb in Social Security with his payroll tax cut, which could result in a shortfall in barely more than a decade.

Hacking with these nondiscretionary programs creates the precedence to divert the revenue streams to pay off the debt accumulated by Wall Street.

From a political perspective many liberals are as mesmerized by the dog-and-pony show as Tea Partiers. They inhabit separate but similar reality-free bubbles. Liberals can't reconcile their devotion to Obama the messianic liberal with his record of cutting social welfare, coddling investment banks, waging seven separate wars, ordering the extrajudicial assassination of US citizens, attacking teachers unions, letting the foreclosure crisis fester, and sabotaging climate change accords.

Glenn Greenwald calls it the "the standard pattern of self-disempowerment used by American liberals to render themselves impotent and powerless in Washington." He detailed a six-step process of how liberals capitulate based on pragmatism, threats, and the "Extremely Important Election coming."

Such is the state of American politics in which the work of dismantling the welfare state and reinforcing the warfare state takes place before our eyes but our minds are so absorbed by the theatre of the permanent election that we are unable to see the stage beneath. Ⓐ

guest columnist

Now the Work of Movements Begins

AMY GOODMAN

The election is over, and President Barack Obama will continue as the 44th president of the United States. There will be much attention paid by the pundit class to the mechanics of the campaigns, to the techniques of micro-targeting potential voters, the effectiveness of get-out-the-vote efforts. The media analysts will fill the hours on the cable news networks, proffering post-election chestnuts about the accuracy of polls, or about either candidate's success with one demographic or another. Missed by the mainstream media, but churning at the heart of our democracy, are social movements, movements without which President Obama would not have been re-elected.

President Obama is a former community organizer himself. What happens when the community organizer in chief becomes the commander in chief? Who does the community organizing then? Interestingly, he offered a suggestion when speaking at a small New Jersey campaign event when he was first running for president. Someone asked him what he would do about the Middle East. He answered with a story about the legendary 20th-century organizer A. Philip Randolph meeting with President Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Randolph described to FDR the condition of black people in America, the condition of working people. Reportedly, FDR listened intently, then replied: "I agree with everything you have said. Now, make me do it." That was the message Obama repeated.

There you have it. Make him do it. You've got an invitation from the president himself.

For years during the Bush administration, people felt they were hitting their heads against a brick wall. With the first election of President Obama, the wall had become a door, but it was only open a crack. The question was, Would it be kicked open or slammed shut? That is not up to that one person in the White House, no matter how powerful. That is the work of movements.

Ben Jealous is a serious organizer with a long list of accomplishments, and a longer list of things to get done, as the president and CEO of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. 2013, he notes, is a year of significant anniversaries, among them the 150th anniversary of President Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation, the 50th anniversary of the 1963 March on Washington, as well as the 50th anniversaries of the assassination of Medgar Evers and the Birmingham, Ala., church bombing that killed four young African-American girls. President Obama's 2013 Inauguration will occur on Martin Luther King Jr. Day. Jealous told me on election night, as Mitt Romney was about to give his concession speech, "We have to stay in movement mode."

Young immigrants are doing just that. Undocumented students, getting arrested in sit-ins in politicians' offices, are the modern-day civil-rights movement. There are other vibrant movements as well, like Occupy Wall Street, like the fight for marriage equality, which won four out of four statewide initiatives on Election Day. In the aftermath of Superstorm Sandy, and despite the enormous resources expended by the fossil-fuel industry to cloud the issue, climate change and what to do about it is now a topic that President Obama hints he will address, saying, in his victory address in election night, "Democracy in a nation of 300 million can be noisy and messy and complicated. ... We want our children to live in an America that isn't burdened by debt, that isn't weakened by inequality, that isn't threatened by the destructive power of a warming planet."

It was pressure from grass-roots activists protesting in front of the White House that pushed Obama to delay a decision on the controversial Keystone XL pipeline, proposed to run from Canada to the Gulf of Mexico. More than 1,200 people were arrested at a series of protests at the White House one year ago. Now a group is blocking the construction of the southern leg of that pipeline, risking arrest and even injury, with direct-action blockades in tree-sits and tripods in Winnsboro, Texas, two hours east of Dallas.

When those who are used to having the president's ear whisper their demands to him in the Oval Office, if he can't point out the window and say, "If I do as you ask, they will storm the Bastille," if there is no one out there, then he is in big trouble. That's when he agrees with you. What about when he doesn't?

The president of the United States is the most powerful person on Earth. But there is a force more powerful: People organized around this country, fighting for a more just, sustainable world. Now the real work begins. Ⓐ

Denis Moynihan contributed research to this column. Amy Goodman is the host of "Democracy Now!," a daily international TV/radio news hour airing on more than 1,000 stations in North America. She is the author of "Breaking the Sound Barrier," recently released in paperback and now a New York Times best-seller.

guest editorial

An Open Letter to Barack Obama

BILL AYERS

Dear President Obama:

Congratulations! I'm sure this is a moment you want to savor, a time to take a deep breath, get some rest, hydrate, regain your balance, and take a long walk in the sunshine. It might be as well a good time to reflect, rethink, recharge, and perhaps reignite. I sincerely hope that it is, and I urge you to put education on your reflective agenda.

The landscape of "educational reform" is currently littered with rubble and ruin and wreckage on all sides. Sadly, your administration has contributed significantly to the mounting catastrophe. You're not alone: The toxic materials have been assembled as a bipartisan endeavor over many years, and the efforts of the last several administrations are now organized into a coherent push mobilized and led by a merry band of billionaires including Bill Gates, Michael Bloomberg, Sam Walton, and Eli Broad.

Whether inept or clueless or malevolent—who's to say?—these titans have worked relentlessly to take up all the available space, preaching, persuading, promoting, and, when all else fails, spreading around massive amounts of cash to promote their particular brand of school change as common sense. You and Secretary Arne Duncan—endorsed in your efforts by Newt Gingrich, Paul Ryan, and a host of reactionary politicians and pundits—now bear a major responsibility for that agenda.

The three most trumpeted and simultaneously most destructive aspects of the united "school reform" agenda are these: turning over public assets and spaces to private management; dismantling and opposing any independent, collective voice of teachers; and reducing education to a single narrow metric that claims to recognize an educated person through a test score. While there's absolutely no substantive proof that this approach improves schooling for children, it chugs along unfazed—fact-free, faith-based reform at its core, resting firmly on rank ideology rather than any evidence whatsoever.

The three pillars of this agenda are nested in a seductive but wholly inaccurate metaphor: Education is a commodity like any other—a car or a refrigerator, a box of bolts or a screwdriver—that is bought and sold in the marketplace. Within this controlling metaphor the schoolhouse is assumed to be a business run by a CEO, with teachers as workers and students as the raw material bumping along the assembly line while information is incrementally stuffed into their little up-turned heads.

It's rather easy to begin to think that "downsizing" the least productive units, "outsourcing" and "privatizing" a space that was once public, is a natural event. Teaching toward a simple standardized measure and relentlessly applying state-administered (but privately developed and quite profitable) tests to determine the "outcomes" (winners and losers) becomes a rational proxy for learning; "zero tolerance" for student misbehavior turns out to be a stand-in for child development or justice; and a range of sanctions on students, teachers, and schools—but never on lawmakers, foundations, corporations, or high officials (they call it "accountability")—is logical and level-headed.

I urge you to resist these policies and reject the dominant metaphor as wrong in the sense of inaccurate as well as wrong in the sense of immoral.

Education is a fundamental human right, not a product. In a free society education is based on a common faith in the incalculable value of every human being; it's constructed on the principle that the fullest development of all is the condition for the full development of each, and, conversely, that the fullest development of each is the condition for the full development of all. Further, while schooling in every totalitarian society on earth foregrounds obedience and conformity, education in a democracy emphasizes initiative, courage, imagination, and entrepreneurship in order to encourage students to develop minds of their own.

When the aim of education and the sole measure of success is competitive, learning becomes exclusively selfish, and there is no obvious social motive to pursue it. People are turned against one another as every difference becomes a potential deficit. Getting ahead is the primary goal in such places, and mutual assistance, which can be so natural in other human affairs, is severely restricted or banned. It's no wonder that cheating scandals are rampant in our country and fraudulent claims are commonplace.

Race to the Top is but one example of incentivizing bad behavior and backward ideas about education as the Secretary of Education begins to look and act like a program officer for some charity rather than the leading educator for all children: It's one state against another, this school against that one, and my second grade in fierce competition with the second grade across the hall.

You have opposed privatizing social security, pointing out the terrible risks the market would impose on seniors if the voucher plan were ever adopted. And yet you've

supported—in effect—putting the most endangered young people at risk through a similar scheme. We need to expand, deepen, and fortify the public space, especially for the most vulnerable, not turn it over to private managers. The current gold rush of for-profit colleges gobbling up student loans is but one cautionary tale.

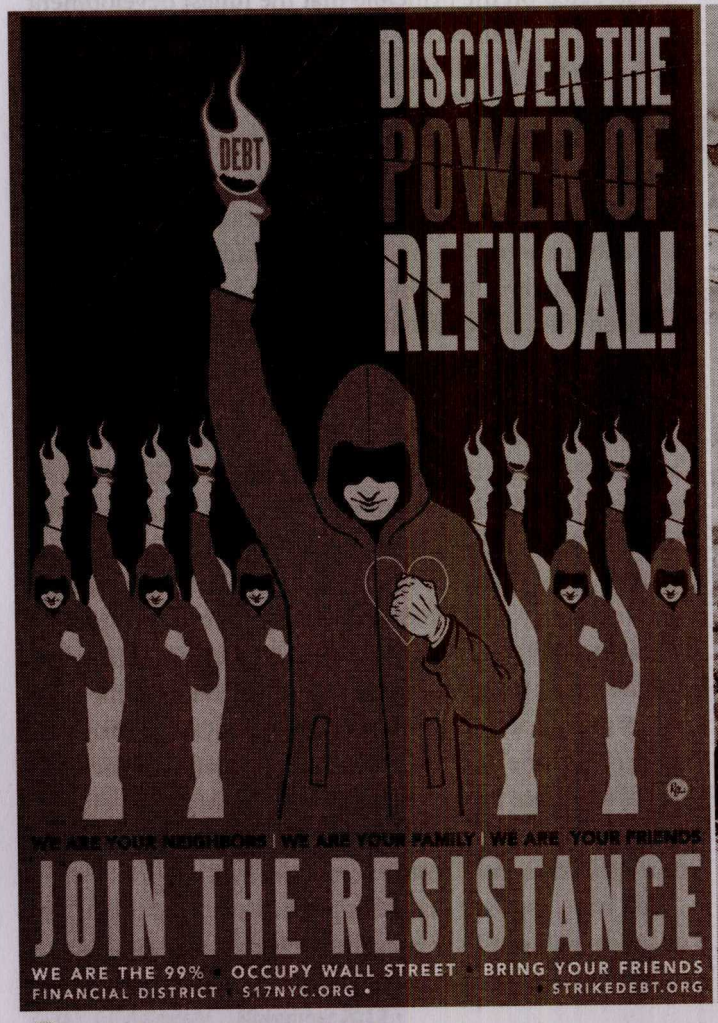
You've said that you defend working people and their right to organize and yet you have publicly and noisily maligned teachers and their unions on several occasions. You need to consider that good working conditions are good teaching conditions, and that good teaching conditions are good learning conditions. We can't have the best learning conditions if teachers are forced away from the table, or if the teaching corps is reduced to a team of short-termers and school tourists.

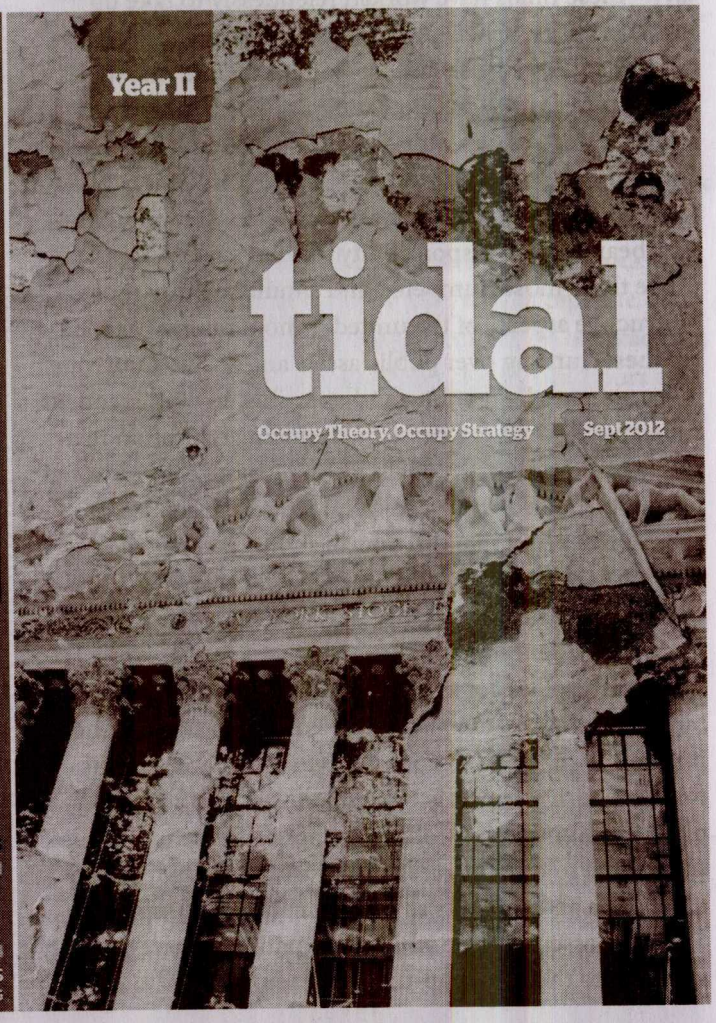
You have declared your support for a deep and rich curriculum for all students regardless of circumstance or background, and yet your policies rely on a relentless regimen of standardized testing, and test scores as the sole measure of progress.

You should certainly pause and reconsider. What's done is done, but you can demonstrate wisdom and true leadership if you pull back now and correct these dreadful mistakes.

In a vibrant democracy, whatever the most privileged parents want for their children must serve as a minimum standard for what we as a community want for all of our children. Arne Duncan attended the University of Chicago Laboratory Schools (as did our three sons); you sent your kids to Lab, and so did your friend Rahm Emanuel. There students found small classes, abundant resources, and opportunities to experiment and explore, ask questions and pursue answers to the far limits, and a minimum of time-out for standardized testing. They found, as well, a respected and unionized teacher corps, people who were committed to a life-long career in teaching and who were encouraged to work cooperatively for their mutual benefit (and who never would settle for being judged, assessed, rewarded, or punished based on student test scores).

Good enough for you, good enough for the privileged, then it must be good enough for the kids in public schools everywhere—a standard to be aspired to and worked toward. Any other ideal for our schools, in the words of John Dewey who founded the school you chose for your daughters, "is narrow and unlovely; acted upon it destroys our democracy." Ⓐ





Towards a New Abolitionism

J.A. MYERSON

When I began to write this essay, there were cars floating on Wall Street. It sounds like some sort of trader lingo, perhaps describing General Motors stock, but individual automobiles were in fact riding Hurricane Sandy's surge merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily gently down the capital of capital. Enormous gusts of wind outside my window carried distant sirens, and messages online carried news of power outages, flooding, inaccessible evacuation routes, infrastructural damage, and, eventually, heartbreaking deaths.

As usual, it is difficult to express appropriate distress when something like this happens. Compounding the distress, there is an "as usual" factor in the first place. *The Onion*, also as usual, provided gave eloquent voice to my sense. "Nation Suddenly Realizes," the headline read, "This Just Going To Be A Thing That Happens From Now On."

Weird weather is now way weirder than ever before, and the weirdness amplification is on track for exponential increase, as our carbon output continues to exacerbate the climate crisis. Hurricane Sandy came after a summer so hot and dry that the Department of Agriculture designated more than half of all American counties "disaster zones." Three-quarters of the United States' cattle acreage were in drought, and half of its corn crop was rated very poor to poor. Wildfires in Colorado that consumed hundreds of homes were due in large part to the previous winter, which had brought "scant snow" to the Rockies. A friend of mine is haunted by an image she encountered in Oklahoma: fish baked into the hot, cracked earth where a lake used to be.

Lists like these seem sophistic, at a certain point. Every year, people like me are able to point to the recent weather, which is the weirdest it's ever been, knowing full well that the next year's highlights are likely to eclipse what's going on right now. DARA International's September 2012 Climate Vulnerability Monitor report predicted that one hundred million human beings will die climate-driven deaths over the next eighteen years—before Sasha Obama turns thirty. 80 percent of the slaughter will be in low-emission countries. A capitalistic slaughter to make the killings by communism and fascism look merciful.

The environmental movement's two biggest political operations, the Sierra Club and the League of Conservation Voters, have formally endorsed and spent millions to support a Presidential campaign predicated on automobile-worship. Thanks to the Ohio-centric mandates the electoral college places on Presidential campaigns, not just cars but also coal has its virtues routinely extolled to great applause from Democrats. The hall at Charlotte's Democratic National Convention was also very pleased about the toppling of an uncooperative dictator, subsequent to whose summary rape and execution, the country's oil was privatized.

No one ever brought the climate up at any of the four debates—the first time this has happened since 1988, when we started to know about the carbon problem. To the contrary, the candidates took one occasion to compete for supremacy of fealty to the climate's mega-villain, the fossil-fuels industry. "We're actually drilling on more public lands than the previous Administration," President Obama bragged, "and the previous President was an oilman!" Governor Romney nonetheless castigated the President for having "cut permits and licenses on federal land and federal waters in half." This is half as good as the policy we need, but, as Obama answered, even that half-good policy is "not true, Governor Romney."

The President later told MTV's Sway that he was "surprised" that the crisis "didn't come up in one of the debates," despite the two whole evenings in which the candidates, unencumbered by questions, were given gaping leeway to discuss whatever they wanted, or just repeat themselves. I'm referring here to the two debates "moderated" by men. It was one of the female moderators, though, CNN's Candy Crowley, who put the issue in starkest relief, when she offered contrition for her neglect to "all of you climate change people," as though this were the passion project of a minor interest group rather than the murderer in advance of one hundred million people over the next eighteen years.

Activists call this phenomenon "climate silence." Three hours before the MTA was shut down in anticipation of

Hurricane Sandy, about thirty people gathered in Times Square to unfurl a parachute bearing the words End Climate Silence with a picture of a hurricane. The event had come together with a day of planning, in which time the parachute was painted at the home of Duncan Meisel. Meisel works for 350.org, which sent an aerial photo of the event to its e-mail list during the storm, urging subscribers to share the photo on Facebook.

"Climate change is an ecological reality," Meisel told me in Times Square. "But it's also a political reality." Blame for the latter goes partly to "our elected officials, our supposed leaders, who aren't doing their job right now," but ultimately resides with the fossil fuel industry, which is "trying to undertake the biggest heist in planetary history" by "selling our future for trillions of dollars."

Bill McKibben, founder of 350.org, laid it out with austere clarity this summer in *Rolling Stone*. If we're to retain any hope of slowing down the climate-fueled genocide, we have to make sure that we don't pump more than 565 gigatons of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. The problem is that the value of the richest industrial sector in the history of capitalism depends on the 2,795 gigatons of carbon it is already planning to release. As McKibben wrote, "You can have a healthy fossil-fuel balance sheet, or a relatively healthy planet—but now that we know the numbers, it looks like you can't have both. Do the math: 2,795 is five times 565. That's how the story ends."

To reiterate: the houses burned up in Colorado plus the fish baked into lakes in Oklahoma plus the flooded streets of Manhattan are chump change next to a climate collapse that is inevitable unless the richest industry in history is forcibly devalued by eighty percent. The required response, in other words, is the public seizure of a massive amount of private wealth. The required response is abolition.

Naturally, the short-term beneficiaries of long-term genocide approach the cognitive dissonance of their situation with considerable incoherence. Only from a place of deep intellectual confusion could Exxon Mobil CEO Rex Tillerson reassure the Council of Foreign Relations that climate change is "an engineering problem and it has engineering solutions" such as "[moving] crop production around." See? It's as easy as forcibly relocating the population of Iowa. Thanks, engineering!

The petro-executive collective known as the US Chamber of Commerce offered similarly sage advice in a comment submitted to the Environmental Protection Agency, which contended that "populations can acclimatize to warmer climates via a range of behavioral, physiological, and technological adaptations." The physiological adaptation phase should be interesting. According to DARA, it will begin with the extermination of one hundred million Africans and South Asians and Caribbean and Pacific Islanders who lack the evolutionary advantages of immunity to diarrheal infections, heat and cold illnesses, hunger, malaria and vector borne diseases, meningitis, environmental disasters, air pollution, indoor smoke, occupational hazards, and skin cancer.

The torture of having to choose between resource extraction profitability and an Earth hospitable to human life does not just produce crazy behavior in the ownership class; the self-conflict is national. American capitalism increasingly resembles that of a petro-state, Matt Stoller points out at the website *Naked Capitalism*, by which he means that a simply enormous portion of the country's capital stock is invested in fossil fuels. The reason this is such a profitable investment is that, as a nation, our economy, infrastructure, and livelihoods all depend, to varying extents, on the product. It's cheaper, allegedly, than other sorts of energy.

If this is puzzling to most Americans, for whose daily experience the chief downside to oil, as candidates reliably note, is how expensive it is as the gas pump, it is nowhere near as shocking as the truth, which is that oil is lethally cheap. If the price of oil accurately communicated the danger posed by its consumption, gas would be prohibitively expensive. That would, per the genocide in progress, be a good thing.

As long as carbon doesn't dig into our individual pockets, human beings are reasonably good at handling the cognitive dissonance by effectively ignoring the crisis. After all, it is very difficult, even for those who elect to confront the crisis, to get a sense of the scale. What is one really to make of the massacre of one hundred million humans over eighteen years? The numbers become so devastating that they lose comprehensibility.

The self-conflict isn't only ubiquitous, it is ideological-cultural. The story America wants to believe is that capitalism freed the world, which does not admit of the story that is unfolding, in which the same forces that enabled capitalism to lift so many people out of poverty are the ones accelerating a genocide. The industrial revolution and the rise of rational economics were supposed to have concluded the era when agricultural slumps brought entire national and international economies into depression. Today, market liberalization combined with state subsidy return us to agriculture-fueled depressions over entire global regions. How does a complicit cog come to terms with the completion of this historical loop? How to dismantle a national mythology?

So far, people seem to lean heavily on climate silence as a coping mechanism—a willfully imposed calm before a

collectively-exacerbated storm.

The President of the United States, for his part, touted his three-pronged record to MTV:

1) Doubling of fuel-mileage standards—to the scale that Michael Dukakis, in his 1988 Presidential campaign, proposed should take effect in 2000.
2) Doubling clean energy production—an investment increase whose modesty is plainly visible in the charts from the aforementioned Matt Stoller article.
3) Negotiating targets in Copenhagen—which McKibben described in *Rolling Stone* as a "face-saving" measure "that fooled very few."

This is unsatisfying tripe, but Obama is incapable of advocating for something as radical as the abolition of a huge portion of his petro-state's capital stock, which is the only satisfying non-tripe. There is no capitalist response sufficient to solve the crisis, and Obama is a capitalist, the head of a capitalist party vying for control of the capitalist government of a capitalist country. There is no way he can be the one to propose the abolitionist solution; that has to come from the mass of people. There must be a new abolitionist movement in the United States.

The United States has abolished an industrial practice of this scale before because its ethical price was intolerable. That practice was chattel slavery. The agricultural economy fueled by that industrial practice was at the very nexus of global market power; textiles from Southern cotton fueled Britain's industrial development into the uncontested financial and military giant of the world, which it remained for decades.

The Southern power elite, whose faults, needless to say, were many and grievous, were just as resolute then as Exxon Mobil CEO Tillerman is today that the abolitionist project is an absurdity because of its enormous cost. Here's an excerpt of a speech given before congress by Rep. James Henry Hammond (D-SC) on February 1, 1836:

> There are about 2,300,000 slaves at this moment in the United States, and their annual increase is about 60,000. Sir, even the British Government did not dare to emancipate its enslaved West India subjects without some compensation. They gave them [the owners] about sixty percent of

Above: Protesters against a tar sands oil pipeline, August 2011. 40 people were arrested.

> their value. It could scarcely be expected that this Government would undertake to free our slaves without paying for them. Their value, at $400, average, (and they are now worth more than that) would amount to upwards of nine hundred millions. The value of their annual increase, alone, is twenty-four millions of dollars; so that to free them in one hundred years, without the expense of taking them from the country, would require an annual appropriation of between thirty-three and thirty-four millions of dollars. The thing is physically impossible.

The thing, it turned out, was physically possible. Unfortunately, a lot of the physical activity required was in the waging of a terrifyingly bloody civil war. Though the oil industry's historic willingness to kill non-violent opponents and Steve Coll's description of Exxon Mobil as a sovereign unto itself which exercises its own foreign policy may keep us up at night, they are not actually dispositive. After all, abolitionism did not spread from the 1830s to 1861 by agitating for war, nor did the Civil War begin in 1861 as an abolitionist venture. Thus far, no states are threatening to secede from the union over fossil fuel abolition, not least because no one in the government is proposing fossil fuel abolition.

War is not required to abolish fossil fuels, but organizing heft and finesse are. At Waging Nonviolence, George Lakey likens the eco-justice movement ahead to the Civil Rights Movement and provides a useful framework for understanding the latter's organizational thinking. "Organizers learn to speak the language of those they are connecting with," he writes, "in our case, people who are ambivalent in their analysis and vision but are daily becoming clearer about their interests."

Sometimes those ambivalent in their analysis and vision but increasingly clear about their interests include unexpected figures. Mayor Michael Bloomberg, he of the $25 billion portfolio, endorsed President Obama during the campaign, specifically contending that Hurricane Sandy has clarified his interests. "Our climate is changing," the mayor wrote. "And while the increase in extreme weather we have experienced in New York City and around the world may or may not be the result of it, the risk that it may be—given the devastation it is wreaking—should be enough to compel all elected leaders to take immediate action."

I have heard experienced organizers pose their profession's central question thus: "Who can give you what you want, and how can you exert pressure on them?" Well, who can abolish fossil fuels? The government, sure—but not just the government. Somebody, after all, actually *owns* that massive amount of capital stock. And they didn't have a great day with Sandy temporarily destroying downtown Manhattan. The New York Stock Exchange had to close down, insurance companies will have tens of billions of dollars to pay out, and hedge fund holders' fossil fuel money could be spent quite profitably elsewhere.

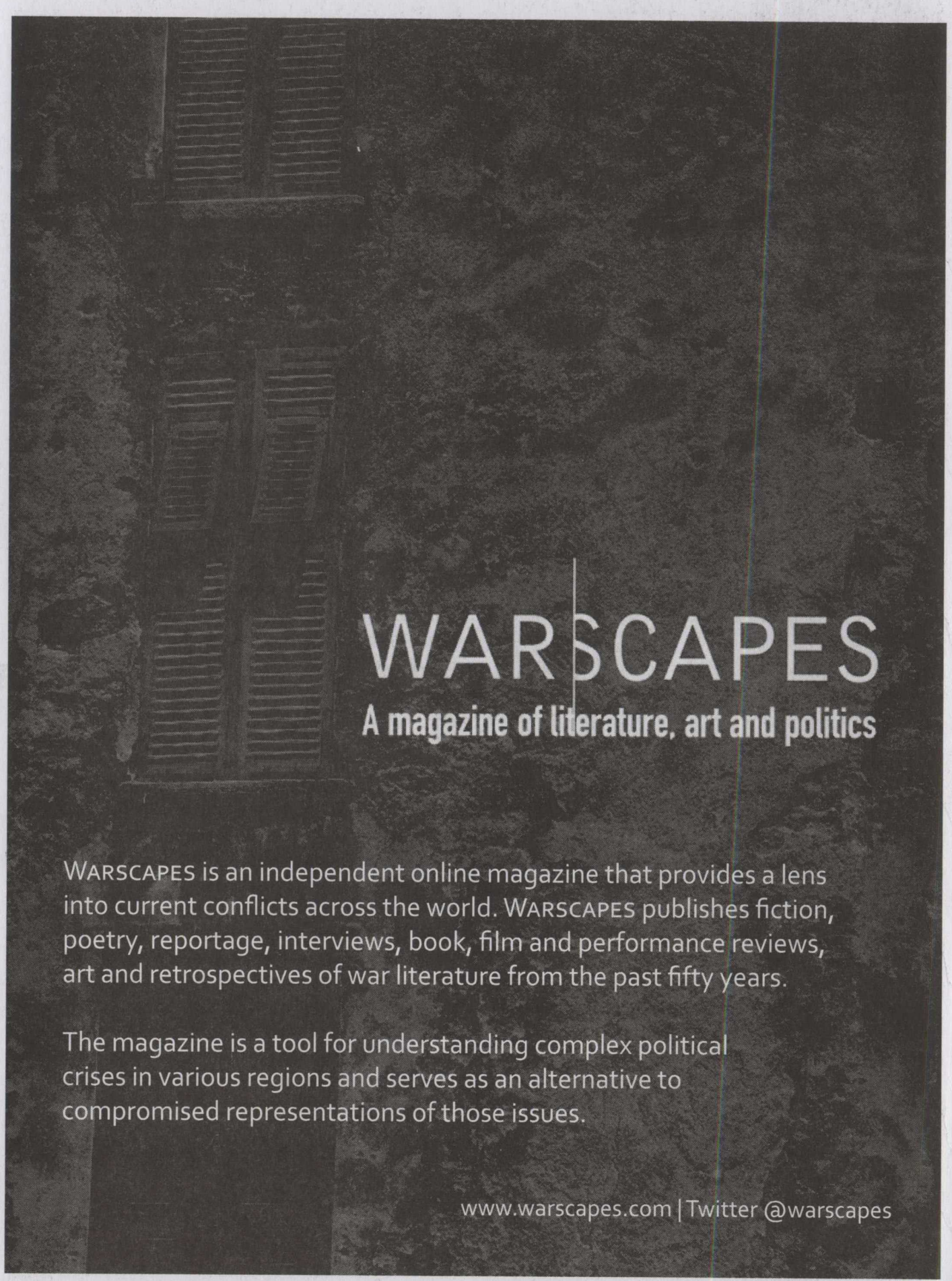
Mayor Bloomberg poses an interesting challenge to organizers, insofar as he can be a harbinger of an intra-1% conflict between the New Yorkers with the banks and the Texans with the drills. If he is serious that Sandy "should be enough to compel all elected leaders," of which he is one, "to take immediate action," he has a couple of handy ways of starting the trend, beyond his nameplate donations to the Sierra Club, etc. He could, were he so inclined, spread $20 billion around to thousands of different groups attempting to confront the climate crisis, and still be a multi-billionaire. Otherwise, he could talk to his buddies and attempt to marshal some major capital investment in renewable energy to drive down its price, giving it a competitive advantage with the fossil fuel industry. Better yet, the man could do both.

One lesson, at least, can be gleaned profitably from the Civil War, in thinking about a modern abolitionism: the movement succeeded by forming a symbiotic relationship with one side of a national fissure. Abolitionism benefited from adopting the Union, and the Union benefited from adopting abolitionism. Michael Bloomberg is no Abraham Lincoln, but misery, as the clown says, acquaints a man with strange bedfellows, and we got plenty of misery.

The trick is exerting pressure. We are very lucky that some courageous and difficult activism is taking place around the Spectra Pipeline, Via Verde, a similar pipeline in Puerto Rico, mountaintop removal sites in West Virginia, the sundry attempts to pump the Alberta tar sands and throw another blanket of carbon atop the heating earth, and other front lines of struggle. 350.org is undertaking a large mobilization to get colleges to divest from the fossil fuels industry.

These measures are good, but will have to expand manifold in the coming days, years, and decades in order to sufficiently dramatize the crisis to propel change. The struggle to abolish the fossil fuel industry cannot be accomplished only by anarchists and greens, who have been marginalized and criminalized by the Green Scare—political cousin to the Red Scare of the Cold War. Liberals, who appeal to compassion in defining their political viewpoint, will have to start putting in a lot more sweat equity than they have so far, to the tune of being willing to go to jail, routinely, in the tens of thousands. Compassion is lovely, but action is what's needed.

None of us can save the hundred million people who will die over the next eighteen years, but we can hope to help the hundred million that come next. Sandy is gone, and abolition is before us. Ⓐ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Keeping Faith with the Kids

MICHAEL BUSCH

For nearly fifty years, Jonathan Kozol has documented the landscape of impoverished America. Since the appearance of his path-breaking memoir *Death at an Early Age*, which detailed his experiences as a teacher in the Boston public school system, Kozol has produced perhaps the most influential body of work illustrating the links between broken schools and the perpetuation of socioeconomic injustice for the poor in America. At the heart of this campaign are a series of books looking at life in the South Bronx. The portrait Kozol paints is as harrowing in its descriptions of institutional failure and structural violence as it is hopeful in its stories of the resilient children that populate New York City's streets, schools, and churches.

Fire in the Ashes, Kozol's latest effort, returns to the lives of the children featured in previous books, and traces the trajectory of their journeys from little kids to young adults. Some have survived and are thriving. Others are dead. Yet whether celebrating their successes or mourning their loss, *Fire in the Ashes* underscores the moral necessity of educational opportunity for all children, and makes a persuasive case that the future of our nation's democracy depends on it.

Jonathan Kozol spoke at the Graduate Center on Friday, November 9. In advance of this appearance, the *Advocate* had the opportunity to talk with him about his new book, the privatization of public schools in the United States, the education policies of Barack Obama and Mitt Romney, and the lives of his closest friends in the world—the children of *Fire in the Ashes*.

• • •

What motivated you to write *Fire in the Ashes*, and why now?

I first got to know a bunch of kids in Mott Haven in the early 1990s. Mott Haven, as you might know, was then and is still today the poorest neighborhood in all of the South Bronx, which remains the poorest congressional district in the nation. These were extremely poor children. I met most of them when they were six or seven years old. I didn't go to the South Bronx as an interviewer. I never write books in that way. I went there because teachers invited me to visit their schools and I got to know the children—I would see them at school, at their after-school program, at their church. The children would invite me to meet their moms and their dads, their grandmothers, and we became deep friends. I wrote three books about them over the next ten years. A few years passed, and people started asking me, "What happened to those kids? Did you keep in touch with them? How many survived and how many didn't?" So, I thought it was time to write *Fire in the Ashes* in order to keep faith with those kids.

It wasn't difficult. They kept in touch when they became teenagers and young adults. They would call me, I'd keep coming back to visit with them, as they got into their twenties some of them would come up to Cambridge to visit with me for a weekend, and they persistently kept texting me, which was a whole new world. I had to learn how to decode the abbreviations in their charming little messages to me. And some of them, I am sad to say, did not survive. Three (it's interesting to note that they were all boys) had had a very rough time in their elementary schools and in their early teenage years. They'd gone to some of the most deeply segregated, unequal, and dysfunctional schools I have ever seen in the United States. All three of those of those boys ultimately killed themselves. But there were other kids—a far larger number—who managed to rise above the odds, partly because of their own grit and guts, but also because of the well-timed intervention of grown-ups, particularly some of the teachers in the schools of the South Bronx who recognized their gifts. By the way, it should be said that most of these kids did terribly on their standardized exams. They hated that whole test-prep regiment that started when they were in elementary school. But partly because of well-timed intervention these kids were able to win some really triumphant victories.

Philanthropic intervention, about which you seem ambivalent and at times uncomfortable, seems to be one of the two interrelated determinants in the lives

of the children you profile in the book. Can you speak more about this?

One child who dominates the book to a degree is a little girl named Pineapple. I met her when she was in Kindergarten at P.S. 65 in the South Bronx. At that time the school was not only grossly underfunded but also in terrible physical disrepair with very large class sizes. Pineapple had thirty-six classmates in her classes for a couple years in a row. Teachers kept quitting in despair. They'd leave in the middle of the year—at one point in her schooling, Pineapple had seven teachers in the course of two years. The city tried to compensate for huge classes and teachers disappearing by a rigid uniformity in methods of instruction and constant grilling for exams. This just preceded the enactment of No Child Left Behind and was like a model of NCLB. It was very similar in its demands. And it didn't work, it didn't work for any of the kids. Instead of getting wonderful books to read in order to *learn* how to read—which is the way I learned how to read and how children in really good suburban schools learn how to read—they got these pit-pat phonics readers which had no plot, no pictures, no stories but were better than Ambien at putting people to sleep. By the time Pineapple was in fifth grade, I sat down with her and discovered to my horror that this bright little girl whose conversational skills were terrific couldn't read or write a sentence longer than four or five words. She had been artificially retarded by the drill and kill agenda that had been foisted on her school. I was just heartsick.

With the help of an Episcopal priest in the neighborhood who also knew Pineapple very well, we—the priest and I—did something that really went against our values because we both profoundly believe in public education.

Above: Jonathan Kozol.

The priest did everything she could to encourage the teachers—she gave them tremendous moral support. But when we discovered that Pineapple was still at second grade level in the fifth grade, she did what any rich parent would have done—she pulled Pineapple out and put her in a terrific and very expensive prep school for rich children, not one of these self-promoting and bombastic charter schools with names like "Academy for Leadership and Law"—they all seem to be named for marketing purposes, not accuracy. Schools in the suburbs would never be given these sorts of names! It would be considered embarrassing and cheap. And besides, the rich suburban schools don't need to advertise success in this way. They have small class

sizes, well-treated teachers and enough room for innovation. They know their kids are going to succeed. They don't need to play these games.

Suddenly Pineapple had fifteen kids in her class instead of thirty-six and teachers who weren't working under the sword of test-driven, scripted curricula but who were allowed to develop really exciting curricula and had time to actually listen, to encourage Pineapple to ask questions, to think critically. They were able to entice her to learn for its own sake. And all of a sudden, her love of learning came alive. In tenth grade, she said to me, "That was my breakthrough year. From that point on, I knew I could do it, that I could go to college." No one in her family had gone to college, nor had anyone else she knew in her neighborhood. Certainly not a four-year college.

I'm very proud to say that Pineapple did go to college. She's currently a senior at a very fine liberal arts college in New England. I never liked that she had to be pulled out and put in a prep school. The best news for me—this isn't in the book, she told me this recently after the book had gone to press—is that Pineapple has decided to stay an extra year in university and get certified to become a teacher in the public schools. She wants to go back to the South Bronx, as she put it when we talked a few months ago, to "help the ones I left behind." This isn't only an academic victory, but a deeply human one. A moral victory. Some kids who get the special opportunities that Pineapple received figure, "Well, now I cash in. I can go into business, make a lot of money." Pineapple wants to go back and serve the children in her neighborhood. And that's true of five of the other kids in the book, as well, including one who didn't go to college but developed tremendous leadership skills on his own and is now back in the Bronx working with young people who had a tough time when they were children.

The second factor, of course, is the quality of schooling the children receive. Critics of the book, like Wendy Kopp, have attacked you for not properly contextualizing to stories of these children within the broader scope of the educational reform movement of the last fifteen years or so, and have suggested that your arguments are outdated and unnecessarily pessimistic. How do you respond to this charge?

What I found infuriating was that she completely ignores the fact that 90 percent of the book has nothing to do with the education wars in which she's involved. It is written novelistically—most of the book is made up of the gripping stories that people tell me about real children, not abstractions. Wendy Kopp lives in the world of abstract policy. I live in the world of children who have itchy elbows. A teacher once told me, "You know, first graders are squirmy little people." My book is about those squirmy little people, and how they have forged a sense of contributive maturity as they've grown older. I was very angry that she apparently didn't read the majority of the book. And also, I might say that her review is slyly deceptive. She went on for paragraph after paragraph saying all these wonderful things about me. Of course, when that happens, I'm thinking "Uh oh. There's a bomb about to be dropped." And at the end, she lambastes me for ignoring the entire privatizing movement with which she is intimately involved. I made clear in the book that I oppose that movement, but I didn't write about it because it wasn't of any interest to me. She is very closely involved with the

Above: Kozol speaking at Allegheny College in October. PHOTO: CODY MILLER/THE CAMPUS

whole agenda of getting tough on public school teachers with the most punitive methods of accountability, of measuring every little thing a child learns with numbers, but ignoring that which can't be numbered. And she's very close to what Diane Ravitch nicely calls the Billionaire Boys Club which would like nothing better than to dismantle the public education system altogether, or at least demoralize teachers to such an extent that the system itself will disintegrate. I think she's just upset that I fail to see this movement as a significant and positive trend in our society. I think it's very dangerous.

Turning to current events, and the politics of the presidential election, I'm wondering what you make of the past four years? How would you rate the educational policy performance of the Obama administration, and the tenure of the Arne Duncan?

Let me start by saying that my criticism of Arne Duncan has been somewhat distorted by the press. What I said was that Arne Duncan has apparently accepted the fact of apartheid schooling in America and is trying very hard to create high-scoring separate-but-not-equal schools. One of Wendy Kopp's cohorts wrote something to the effect that I had accused him of creating segregated schools or something like that which missed the point entirely. It's not his fault that our country is so polarized and our schools are so segregated. All I was saying was that he doesn't pay attention to that issue.

President Obama's first term in office has been better for intentions than for actual changes in planning and policy. I do believe, and he has several things to this effect, that he would like to provide universal preschool or at least far more preschool for our children. He has made clear at intervals that he has doubts about this whole mania of teaching to the test, and he has periodically spoken respectfully of teachers, but his policies have not greatly changed the agenda of his predecessor, George Bush. President Obama still places far too much emphasis on relentless testing with standardized exams.

There are a number of things about his own signature piece of education policy, Race to the Top, that trouble me. One is that although it offers local districts waivers or exemptions from aspects of NCLB, it set up a number of rules whereby states that want to get a waiver have to put an even sharper sword over their teachers' heads—measuring their teaching ability by the test scores of the students, which is the worst possible way understand the quality of a teacher. Any rigid, non-reflective but psychologically docile teacher can read from a test prep manual and pump the test scores by a couple of points, if that's the game. But really great teachers, and there are an awful lot of them in New York City, I might add—wonderfully creative and interesting teachers—these sorts of teachers were not educated in that manner. They were educated in the full scenario of culture. They were educated in classrooms where there is exists a continuity between the individual items you study as opposed to classrooms where cognition is broken up into tiny little packages that can be numbered. This creates, in my mind, a balkanized form of learning. I hate it. Race to the Top unfortunately encourages the perpetuation of that ethos. The second thing is the name itself—it is highly revelatory. "Race to the Top" suggests a reversion to the same idea that George Bush was advancing, essentially the idea that education *is* a race in which each school, each child, each teacher is in competition with one another. A race to the top suggests that inevitably a lot of schools will be left at the bottom. I regret that. I also happen to think that the jargon of public education is terribly important. Jargon is not neutral; it also contains a bias of some sort. And I think the very name, Race to the Top, implies the very opposite of what should constitute the aims of education.

And Mitt Romney?

The president, with his very fine intelligence, still believes, I think, that public education is a sacred legacy that should be preserved. That's where the great difference comes between the two candidates. Governor Romney, if he's successful, is likely to reduce school funding considerably further debilitating the public sector at a time when low-income districts everywhere are already cutting programs because of funding shortages. He has made it clear, or at least implied, would love a voucher system which represents the gradual dismantling of public education. I also think he is likely to intensify the assault upon the dignity of teachers. That last part is the most disturbing of all. That is my reading of what is implicit in much of his talk, and his close alliance with major corporations who are donors to his campaign seems to me to increase the likelihood that he will encourage the invasion of public schools by the privatizing sector. Governor Romney has said nothing about preschool. I think that giving the poorest kids in America wonderful preschool, and three years of it, starting when they are two-and-a-half, is absolutely crucial.

If President Obama were ever to ask me how to close the race gap in this country, I would say "take all those billions of dollars that you are giving to the corporations and pour that money into ensuring three years of rich developmental preschool for very poor children, and put the rest into cutting class sizes in half at the elementary school level, and offering really strong, intelligent support to teachers instead of scaring the daylights out of them." That's what I'll tell him when he invites me to the White House. Ⓐ

'This is Not Europe!'

Crisis and Revolt in Greece, Part Two

KRISTOFER J. PETERSEN-OVERTON

In the last issue of the Advocate, *Kristofer Petersen-Overton described the historical context and nature of the Greek economic crisis, and outlined the contours of resistance that have emerged in protest to austerity in response. This is the second installment of Petersen-Overton's examination of Greece and the possible fallout from the country's experience with the destructive forces of neoliberal "democratic capitalism."*

Electoral Fallout

Public legitimacy was already at stake prior to Papandreou's ouster last year when he dared to suggest a national referendum on austerity. By last May, politicians were unable to appear in public without being pelted with eggs or yoghurt and jeered by angry citizens. Greeks regularly referred to parliamentarians as "traitors," "thieves," or "criminals." Thus, the outcome of May's election was not at all surprising: turnout was lower than usual and no party received more than 19 percent of the vote, precluding the possibility of cobbling together a parliamentary majority and necessitating a second round of elections six weeks later on June 17.

This time around, the electoral outcome resembled a clear referendum on the austerity memoranda. Those in favor voted New Democracy, while those opposed coalesced around the Coalition of the Radical Left (SYRIZA), a young party containing a mixed bag of leftists, from Trotskyites to moderate social democrats. Unlike the mainstream parties, SYRIZA called for a renegotiation of the Troika loan agreement, a position as attractive to those on the raw end of austerity as it was terrifying to European elites. Animated by SYRIZA's unexpected success at the polls during the first round (at second place, it won 16.8 percent of the vote to New Democracy's 18.9 percent), anti-austerity voters threw their full weight behind the party during the second. The outcome completely upset the mainstream electoral structure that had been in place since the *Metapolitefsi* period began. New Democracy came away with 29.7 percent, SYRIZA 26.9 percent, and Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK) a dismal 12.3 percent. Thanks to an outrageous parliamentary rule granting an additional fifty seats to the winner, these results handed New Democracy 129 seats to SYRIZA's seventy-one. Aligning with their old foes, New Democracy was able to scrape together an alliance comprising PASOK and another small leftist party, Democratic Left (DIMAR), which added an additional thirty-three and seventeen seats respectively for a grand total of 179. Bankers across Europe breathed a sigh of relief: the mainstream political establishment was effectively back in control—barely.

SYRIZA's surprising electoral gains came primarily at the expense of the Greek Communist Party (KKE) and other minor left-wing parties, but the party also attracted a high number of conservative voters repelled by the mainstream parties' uncritical acceptance of economic austerity. Several people I spoke with expressed their seemingly paradoxical inability to choose between SYRIZA and the neofascist Golden Dawn! While shocking, this phenomenon underscores the degree to which austerity eclipsed other political issues. But if this was the case, why didn't SYRIZA win? Yiannis Mavris recently pointed out in the *New Left Review* that SYRIZA's failure to gain a plurality of votes had less to do with the party's campaign strategy than with the high number of voter abstentions (most of whom sympathize with SYRIZA's anti-austerity position) and, more importantly, with "the massive campaign to intimidate the population that was launched from both within and outside the country."

Domestic and foreign media outlets propagated the idea that a victory for SYRIZA would bring about Greece's exit or expulsion from the Eurozone, as well as confiscation or even loss of bank deposits; the country would be unable to pay salaries and pensions, and as funds dried up there would be shortages of fuel for transportation and heating.

The scare campaign on behalf of European economic elites seems to have helped stymie a SYRIZA victory for now. Though SYRIZA has equivocated on the desirability of a Greek exit from the Eurozone, the party has become synonymous with that intention for many Greeks—a prospect most refuse to consider, regardless of their position on austerity. Nevertheless, that SYRIZA succeeded in dismantling the post-war electoral system is a remarkable achievement. It remains to be seen whether

or not the party will be able to hold onto its newly gained constituency, but for the first time in a while a resurgent Left has changed the terms of the debate. According to poll data, those who voted for SYRIZA did so on ideological conviction. By contrast, those who voted for New Democracy did so mainly to deny SYRIZA a victory. This is not exactly firm ground for any government. As the new coalition prepares to push through a third round of austerity, there is a strong possibility the government will collapse in the near future. What happens next is anyone's guess.

Though SYRIZA undoubtedly scored a major victory for the Left, another party also made unexpected gains that warrant attention. The neofascist Golden Dawn party claimed just below 7 percent of the vote in both rounds, earning it eighteen seats in parliament. With its history of violence and clear use of fascist dress, imagery, and rhetoric, this is a deeply disturbing outcome. To place the rise of xenophobic extremism in Greece against the backdrop of the economic crisis, we must look at the other crisis Greece faces, namely undocumented immigration.

The Other Crisis

The Greek port of Patra on the country's Western coast resembles something of a makeshift campground, teeming with young men from across North Africa. It's a haunting place; the brilliant waters of the Ionian Sea carry hundreds of ships each day past the islands of Ithaca and Cephalonia to the northwest and on to Mediterranean ports across Southern Europe. While Western tourists come and go as they please, and international shipping freighters load and unload, these young men wait—the human flotsam of neoliberal globalization.

Patra has become a de facto holding zone for many of Greece's undocumented migrants, most of whom hope to eventually stow away aboard a ship bound for better fortunes. Moroccans, Tunisians, Algerians, Egyptians, Sudanese—every one of the couple dozen men I spoke with identified Western Europe as their final destination (usually France, Germany, and the United Kingdom). With the Greek economy on life-support and xenophobic violence on the rise, this is not exactly surprising. Unfortunately for these men, current European law obliges Greece to prevent undocumented migrants from traveling to other states within the EU; and, bizarrely, if it is later discovered

Above: Alexis Tsipras of SYRIZA, known as "Sexy Alexi," has been opposition leader since June.

that an undocumented immigrant living in France originally entered the EU via Greece, France has the option to deport that person back to Greece. This situation provides Western Europe with a healthy buffer against undocumented migration at Southern Europe's expense. The problem has been left to fester in Greek cities, which are now home to hundreds of thousands of impoverished and marginalized immigrants, most of whom have no hope of leaving. I spoke with several groups of undocumented immigrants living adjacent to the port at Patra.

"This is not Europe," one man told me. "This is worse than Algeria. Where are human rights? They call this Europe? They treat us like animals. They beat us, humiliate us. I swear to you I will leave here and go to France. And if I ever see a Greek there—I will kill him."

Excuse me?

"Arabs are a very good people. But if you treat us like animals we become dangerous. I was not so angry before I came to Greece. They don't want me here. Okay. I don't want to be here either, but they won't let us leave and they won't let us live. We are trapped."

Not all of these men are undocumented, but you wouldn't know it. About a quarter of the people I spoke with are legally sanctioned refugees. This entitles them to a guaranteed weekly stipend paid by the EU while the government reviews their case. The process often takes years, but such money is rarely dispersed and refugee status does little to ward off xenophobic attacks from neofascist gangs and the police. Unfortunately, the Greek government does not keep statistics on violent crimes targeting undocumented immigrants, though it's doubtful many would be willing to come forward in any case. Human Rights Watch recently reported a massive spike in xenophobic violence across Greece. In May 2011, following the murder of a Greek man, right-wing gangs stabbed to death a Bangladeshi immigrant and attacked dozens of other presumed immigrants. Since early August, when the government launched a new anti-immigration campaign, the police have detained more than 17,000 migrants according to criteria little more specific than their physical appearance. Those with legitimate documentation often have them confiscated and "lost" by a corrupt police force intent on deporting as many immigrants as possible. In the few incidents of violence against immigrants the government has chosen to investigate, about half involve police aggression.

Among the men I spoke with in Patra was a twenty-year old from Tunisia who wore a cast on his leg. The previous night, he told me, police had woken him and his fellow migrant workers in the early hours and attacked them. His leg was crushed in the scuffle. Fortunately, socialized health care in Greece does not yet discriminate on the basis of race and state medicine was able to repair what the security apparatus had inflicted. Another young man who spoke with me was not so lucky. The police broke his right arm several months ago, permanently paralyzing his hand and leaving severe scarring.

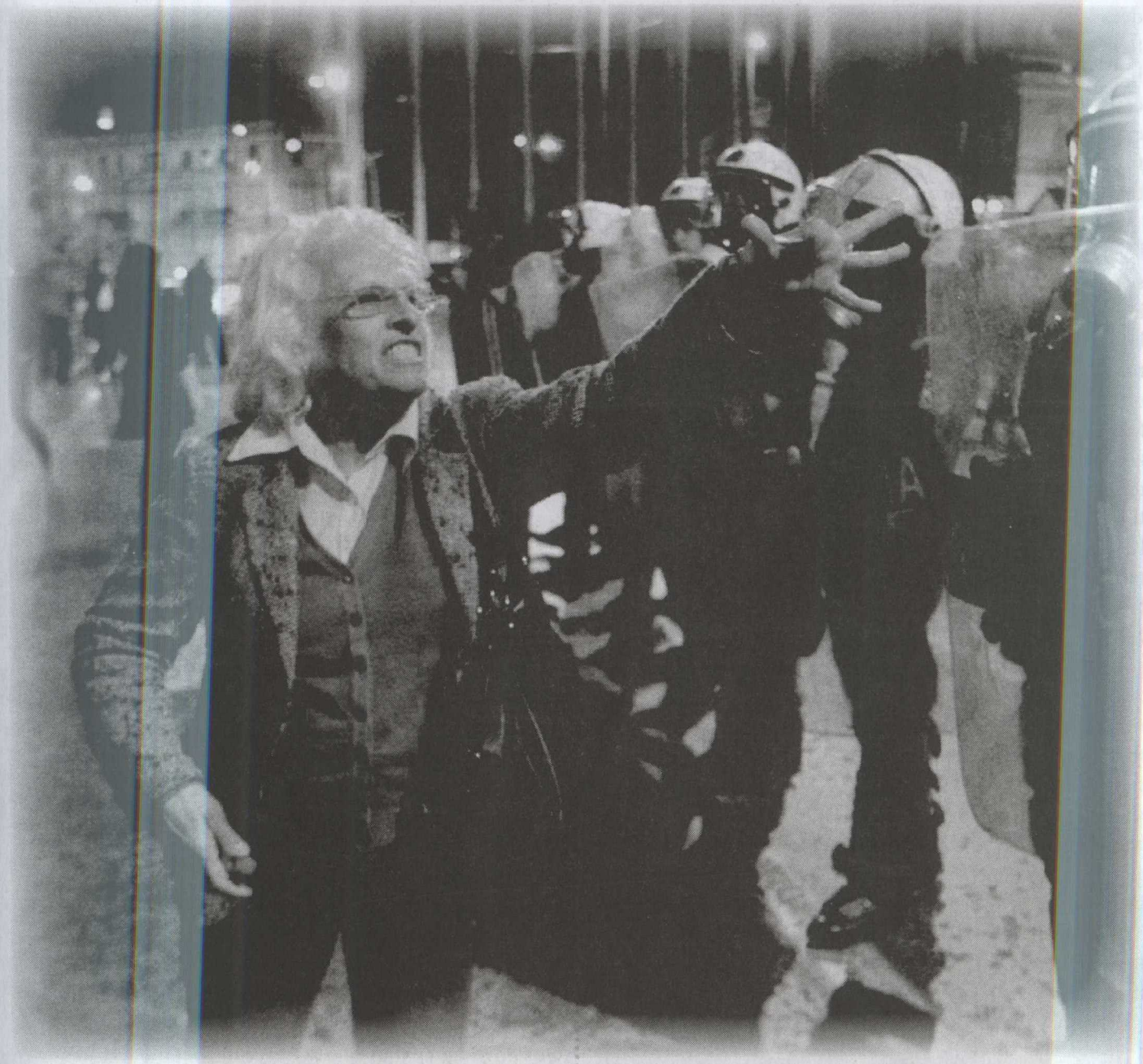
As we spoke, a police car drove slowly past us, casually observing the scene.

"When you go, they will come for us," I was told.

Enter Golden Dawn. In their recent electoral success, one demographic in particular lined up behind the neofascist party: the police force. According to a poll taken by *BHMA* newspaper, a whopping half of Greek police officers voted for Golden Dawn in the second round of elections. This statistic further demonstrates the extent to which the Greek security apparatus remains firmly in the hands of the extreme Right. There are multiple reports of the police using Golden Dawn activists as unofficial muscle on raids against undocumented immigrants. The Greek anarchist movement has taken a strong stand against Golden Dawn and in support of undocumented immigrants. In some cases, the anarchists have deployed contingents of activists to protect immigrants from police and neofascist violence.

> It appears inevitable that Greece will leave the Eurozone sooner or later. The only question remaining is how such an eventuality will unfold and whether it will happen next month or next year.

Golden Dawn has existed at the fringes of Greek politics for decades, but only recently has it made strides in the polls by tapping into popular frustration with the country's undocumented immigration. It should be stressed, however, that neither Golden Dawn nor the police have a monopoly on racism in Greece. Like other Southern European countries, much of Greek society clings to bigoted racial stereotypes. Old-school anti-Semitism is rife, for example, and the abuse formerly reserved for Albanian domestics is now leveled against Africans, Afghans, and Pakistanis. Some attribute Golden Dawn's electoral success to the economic crisis and a kind of populist scapegoating inspired by it, but such an analysis is too simplistic and ignores less virulent, but more widespread racism underlying Greek politics. Across the



political spectrum, immigrants are blamed for bringing crime and drugs. Local shops and restaurants frequently refuse to serve anyone who doesn't resemble a tourist or a Greek. It's just bad for business.

Golden Dawn combines a peculiar mix of national triumphalism and xenophobia with support for policies favorable to seniors. The group recently held an event in central Athens distributing food to the poor and elderly, but there was a catch: handouts were only offered to ethnic Greeks. This kind of obscene political theater together with vigilante policing (party activists have been filmed demanding to see immigration papers from street vendors and other suspected immigrants) has earned the party a mixed reputation—especially because undocumented immigration is an issue that resonates across party lines.

In addition, the party's strong line against austerity has broadened its appeal during the crisis. Unlike other hard-right parties, Golden Dawn's membership is comparatively young, and includes many women. They've been extremely effective at capturing the debate, despite their relative insignificance at the polls. When Golden Dawn's young spokesman, Ilias Kasidiaris, physically assaulted the Greek Communist Party spokeswoman on live television, news anchors commented on his handsome looks!

Conclusion

One morning last April, a seventy-seven-year-old retired chemist named Dimitris Christoulas walked across Syntagma Square just in front of the Greek parliament. He raised a gun to his head and pulled the trigger. For

Above: A protester harangues police in Syntagma Square in April. PHOTO: REUTERS

decades he had paid into a public retirement plan only to have his pension channeled to billionaire bondholders in his twilight years. The appalling reality pushed him to commit an act of bitter desperation. His tragic death, executed in the shadow of parliament, became a rallying cry for the *aganaktismenoi*, capturing in stark human terms the devastation austerity has wreaked.

It's difficult to predict what will happen in Greece, not least because adequate responses from Athens and Brussels have been lacking. To this observer at least, it appears inevitable that Greece will leave the Eurozone sooner or later. The only question remaining is how such an eventuality will unfold and whether it will happen next month or next year. If the country is forced out before adequate preparations can be made, chaos will ensue. If political unrest forces the current government to collapse (very likely) and a new one moves to default, the economic fallout may be more contained but still severe. Incredibly, the government recently admitted that it has not conducted a single study into what a default would look like, refusing to even consider the possibility of such an outcome! Neither option is ideal of course and both are fraught with risk, but the Greek media has largely avoided debate, advancing the European line instead: there is no alternative. Only recently have the arguments of Paul Krugman and others who advocate for a Greek default and a return to a devalued drachma broken into the mainstream.

Every day that passes without a move toward either a definitive bailout or outright expulsion from the Eurozone leaves Greece in political limbo, exacerbating the predicament.

Every day that passes without a move toward either a definitive bailout or outright expulsion from the Eurozone leaves Greece in political limbo, exacerbating the predicament. Capital flight continues apace to the tune of five billion euros each month and Greeks are fleeing the country in droves. In 2011, the United States reported a record number of visa applications placed by Greek citizens. British Prime Minister David Cameron recently threatened to place a temporary ban on Greek immigration altogether, prompting some to joke that Britain should "deport" the Elgin marbles as well.

By its own standards, neoliberalism has been a remarkable success in Greece. SYRIZA was not elected, Greece has not yet defaulted, and the country has been forced into selling off national resources and privatizing much of the public sector. The antiquated belief in popular accountability has been effectively overcome, though mass demonstrations do persist. But the general trend seems to be pushing in one direction. A taxi driver I met in Athens who claimed to support the conservative New Democracy government explained Greece's predicament in a nutshell: "Everyone knows the crisis is bullshit. It's just an excuse for foreign bankers to privatize everything and force us to work until we die. They're trying to make Greece like America but we don't want to be America."

Whether or not Greece remains in the Eurozone, the state still faces a major crisis of legitimacy. Let's not forget that Greece has a recent history of political violence. If armed militants attack parliament or conduct a similar action aimed at the political or security establishment, the authoritarian backlash will be swift. It's not an unlikely scenario, though Europe would surely attempt to prevent such an eventuality. Some in Greece predict ever more violent skirmishes between the state security forces and militant activists. Police ties to the extreme Right make this a very real prospect. Violent street clashes have already occurred between Golden Dawn various anti-fascist groups. A group of anarchists I spoke with in Greece—while openly critical of using violence in this way—claimed to be preparing for the possibility of civil war. This is probably way off the mark, but it reflects the national state of paranoia in which such scenarios no seem farfetched. It's not at all clear how far Europe would be willing to go in a situation of domestic militancy, but it is clear that austerity will continue for the foreseeable future, consigning an entire generation to poverty. This alone is sure to have long-term consequences.

In his suicide note, Dimitris Christoulas likened the Greek parliament to the "Tsolakoglou government," the Quisling regime that ruled Greece during the Axis occupation.

The Tsolakoglou government has annihilated all traces for my survival, which was based on a very dignified pension that I alone paid for thirty-five years with no help from the state. And since my advanced age does not allow me a way of dynamically reacting (although if a fellow Greek were to grab a Kalashnikov, I would be right behind him), I see no other solution than this dignified end to my life, so I don't find myself fishing through garbage cans for my sustenance. I believe that young people with no future will one day take up arms and hang the traitors of this country at Syntagma square, just like the Italians did to Mussolini in 1945.

This crisis was not inevitable, but the Greek experience should chasten us all. We're heading there. Ⓐ

dance REVIEW

'Exhilarating Journeys' at ABT

▶ American Ballet Theatre at City Center.
Saturday, October 20, 8:00 p.m.

MEREDITH BENJAMIN

Fans of American Ballet Theatre (ABT) relish opportunities to see the company perform in the (relatively) intimate setting of City Center during its annual fall season. Here, ABT presents a variety of repertory not seen during their classics-heavy season at the Metropolitan Opera House (think Swan Lake, Sleeping Beauty). This short season—only five days this year—also affords the opportunity to see some of the up-and-coming dancers in the company. As the rest of the year ABT normally relies heavily on international stars and guest artists, the fall season provides a rare opportunity to see dancers from the ranks shine in soloist and principal roles.

Symphony #9

The evening began with Alexei Ratmansky's highly anticipated *Symphony #9*, set to music by Dmitri Shostakovich. Ratmansky is one of the most sought-after choreographers in ballet at the moment, and ABT was lucky enough to snag him as their artist-in-residence.

Symphony #9 is the first piece of a three-part work, all to music by Shostakovich, which will premiere at the Metropolitan Opera House during the company's spring season.

The curtain rose on Sascha Radetsky, surrounded by four men. Radetsky was alternately playful and aggressive, and showed off his speed and precision in a series of duets with fellow soloist Stella Abrera. The ballet offered us hints of drama or narrative without ever giving us a story, a Ratmansky hallmark. Veronika Part, as one-half of the lead couple with

Above: Cory Stearns and Veronika Part in *The Moor's Pavane*. PHOTO: AMERICAN BALLET THEATRE.

Roberto Bolle, was gloriously lush and dramatic. Yet a note of ambiguous paranoia characterized the couple's time on stage, as they often looked around, on the watch for an unseen someone or something.

The choreography, like Shostakovich's score, had a modernist feel with its numerous moving parts working together and then coming apart and mechanical elements contrasting with more lyrical passages. Geometric prints on the costumes added to this modernist aesthetic. The piece was most successful in its unexpected breaks with traditional balletic shapes and conventions. Traditionally, women of the *corps de ballet* often serve as stage dressing, in lines on the side, as the principals dance. Ratmansky played with that concept by having his line of women sit, their knees pulled into their chest and their heads down. Later, when the entire *corps de ballet* lined up in neat rows and turned their heads in a single direction, one expected a grand finale in unison. Instead, every other dancer made his or her way down to the floor, in a series of jerky, disconnected movements.

In keeping with the unconventional groupings that characterized the ballet, soloist Jared Matthews had no partner, and danced both alone and as a mysterious interloper to the others. His was the final triumphant moment: as the music ended, he was caught in mid-air as the lights went out, one arm reaching upwards.

The Moor's Pavane

The program notes for *The Moor's Pavane*, subtitled "Variations on a Theme of Othello," somewhat confusingly inform us that "this dance is not intended as a choreographic version of Shakespeare's play," but rather "the four characters play the tragedy of Everyman." (Let's hope that killing your wife because you mistakenly believe she cheated on you is not in fact the tragedy of every man.) The ballet was choreographed by modern dance master José Limon, and had its premiere in 1949. As in much of the modern choreography of that era, virtuosity and technical feats are shunned in favor of a focus on interiority, portrayed through stylized and dramatic gestures.

The four dancers, dressed in robes, began facing each other in a diamond formation, arms raised in a baroque style. This ballet requires someone with the charisma of Marcelo Gomes for the role of the Moor, who, regal in burgundy, imbued the slightest movements with a sense of gravity and drama. Cory Stearns and Part, as His Friend and His Friend's Wife, respectively, were appropriately devious as they perpetrated their deception, finding a sense of weight and grounded-ness in their movements. Julie Kent, as the white-clad Moor's Wife, falls prey to their scheme and is murdered by her husband: we see only grand arm gestures behind Stearns' outstretched robe, and then, her dead body. Unfortunately, the intensity of the

interior drama was somewhat lost in the upper reaches of the City Center theatre.

In the Upper Room

Set to Philip Glass's propulsive score, Twyla Tharp's *In the Upper Room* is the sort of ballet that I bring people to in order to show them just how exciting contemporary ballet can be. The pre-show announcements that there would be a number of replacements in this final ballet were met with disappointed sighs, but the company proved up to the challenge of the last minute scramble.

The ballet begins as two women, Simone Messmer and Luciana Paris, emerge from smoke, clad in black-and-white striped, loose-fitting shirts and sneakers. Messmer in particular absolutely inhabited her role as one of these two "stompers" who begin and end the piece. She nailed the integral contrasts of the ballet's style: intensity and carelessness, jaunty confidence, and reckless abandon. Sklyar Brandt and Nicole Graniero, as the pair of girls in red pointe shoes (sometimes called "bombers"), also stood out for their energy and precision.

Nothing about this ballet is conventional. There are two groups of dancers: those in sneakers, and those in typical ballet footwear, and their roles and groupings shift throughout. Jogging, kicking, and the tossing of dancers from one partner to another are mixed in with leaping, pirouetting, and classical arabesques. The through line is the incredible intensity and endurance the dancers display as they are propelled forward to the climax of Glass's score, in which a chorus of voices adds drama to the final movement.

The final image of this ballet complemented that of Ratmansky's: whereas that ballet concluded with a singular upward motion, here Messmer and Paris finish the exhausting dance by seeming to draw in the energy of the entire piece as they pull their fists into their bodies. This gesture is a final sign of triumph in an exhilarating journey. Ⓐ

Above: The cast of *Symphony #9*. PHOTO: AMERICAN BALLET THEATRE.

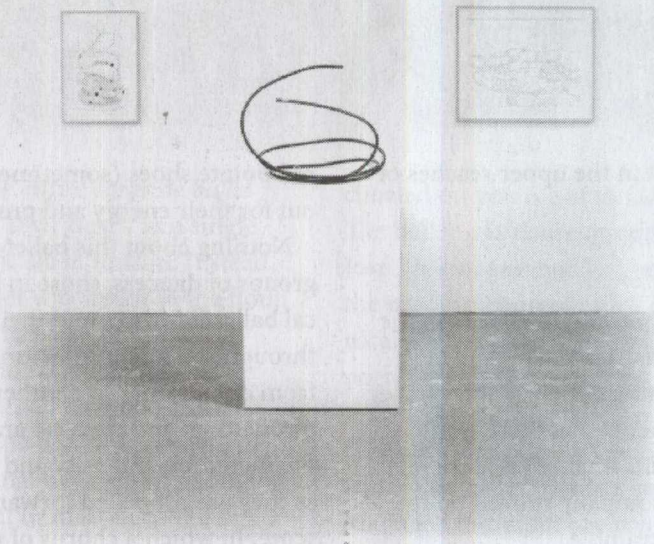
Coming Into Contact with the World

▶ Al Taylor: *Pass the Peas and Can Studys* at David Zwirner.

CLAY MATLIN

It is unclear what sort of career Al Taylor might have had had he not died of lung cancer in 1999. As it stands now he has drifted into one of those odd nether regions of respected but not particularly well-known artists. While many of his contemporaries have gone on to substantial fame and wealth, Taylor's oeuvre, represented by a dense and complicated body of work that is often referred to as "whimsical" or "charming" has been left out of the canon. While these are apt adjectives, they are also derisive. Taylor's is an abstruse art, at once dense and difficult, but also humorous and remarkably full of life—and it is for this reason that the art is so moving.

Therefore, we should look at *Pass the Peas and Can Studys*, Taylor's recent exhibition at David Zwirner—the gallery that represents Taylor's estate—as a prime example of the complexity of his art. Made up of two distinct bodies of work, *Pass the Peas and Can Studys* succeeds because it reveals to us the very important connection between drawing and sculpture in Taylor's art. We cannot, in fact, separate the two. *Pass the Peas*, from 1991–92, is a series of tubular sculptures made of hula-hoops, garden hoses, and plastic-coated cables, formed into coils and loops. They sit on the floor, are attached to the wall, or hang from the ceiling. Small, recycled plastic bottle rings are glued at specific intervals to the sculptures to give sense of "balancing." *Can Studys*, 1993, continues what the gallery calls Taylor's "fascination with circles." Here, Taylor created wall-mounted constructions out of bare tin cans, wood, hot-rolled steel bands, and strips of wire. These sculptures have a ramshackle quality about them, less a physicality than an ephemerality. They cast shadows against the wall, like drawings created by sculptures, reminiscent of Richard Tuttle's wire drawings from the early 1970s.



As with much of Taylor's work, a series of drawings not only mimic, but expand upon the sculptures, giving each medium more substance. Some of the drawings are quite beautiful; in particular, there is an elegant simplicity to his *Pass the Peas* drawings absent from much of those in *Can Studys*. There are, however, moments of real humor in the *Can Studys* series, especially the drawings in which he labels what kind of cans he used. For example, Taylor made sure to mark down that one was "expensive cat food."

And yet *Pass the Peas and Can Studys*, his third solo exhibition with Zwirner, was not a selection of his strongest moments and pales in comparison to 2010's *Rim Jobs and Sideffects*. *Pass the Peas and Can Studys* was overhung (there were thirty-seven pieces taking up the entire space of Zwirner's secondary-market gallery in Chelsea), and felt crowded and in need of a more restrained eye—perhaps a consequence of the artist's absence from the installation. This is not to say, however, that the exhibition was a failure. Taylor does not disappoint. Even his least exciting work, among which I would characterize this selection, has a power most other art does not. There is a gentleness to Taylor's touch reminiscent of his beginnings as a painter, a history that cannot be ignored. He switched to sculpture and drawing upon returning from a trip to Africa in 1980. Finding himself too broke to buy canvas, he was inspired by the memory of children he had seen in Africa making toys from the debris that littered the street. Taylor never went back to painting. Yet he never really became a sculptor either. The rigidity of categories does disservice to him. He was no dilettante making sculptures

one moment, drawings the next while never finding something to satisfy him. Rather, as Taylor approached them sculpture and drawing were one. Each complimented and informed the other. It is impossible to know which came first in his process. Yes, we could look at dates, but that proves nothing about the origin of their creation. They so clearly speak to each other in a language personal to what Taylor made. For this very reason, the order of his process is difficult to penetrate.

Yet this matters little, for it is this intensely personal quality, this Taylorness, that imbues the art with so much life. There are no other Al Taylors. His was a daring originality, one invested not in those metaphysical or moral issues that can so easily trap artists. Nor was Taylor overly pleased with himself as might very well be the danger with work like this. One never gets the sense he is laughing at the viewer or condescending. Taylor might be smiling to himself, it might be a wry smile, but the smile is gentle and open. No cheap or trite meaning awaits us. There may even be no meaning beyond the investigation of the material itself: joy in the act of making. Indeed, as the pragmatist John Dewey wrote in *Art as Experience*, "any authentic artist will avoid material that has previously been esthetically exploited to the full and will seek out material in which his capacity for individual vision and rendering can have free play." Dewey was not writing about playfulness or whimsy here, not childlike playing. Instead, Dewey was referring to imagination having the freedom and capacity to see and feel things as "they compose an integral whole." What he called he "large and generous blending of interests at the point where the mind comes into contact with the world." Taylor's interests were, if nothing else, large *and* generous. His mind *did* come into contact with the world; his sculptures and drawings are proof of this. That they are rough, that they look simple, perhaps even naïve, belies their technical mastery. We are hoodwinked by their very simplicity, tricked into thinking we could do this.

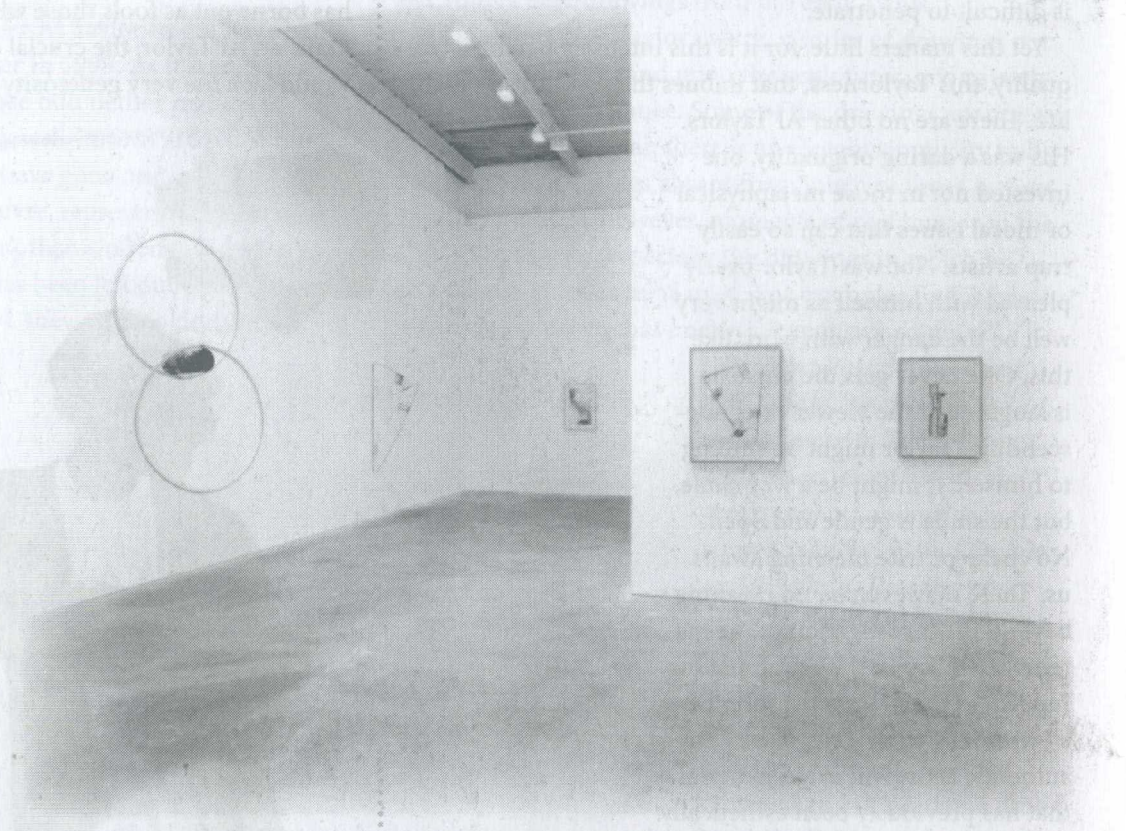
Perhaps we could. Which is to say, perhaps we could make an object approximating an Al Taylor in the same way an art forger makes a painting approximating a Jackson Pollock. People believed they could make Picassos once too, just as it was thought there was nothing to Abstract Expressionism but fields of color and maybe some lines. The lack of clear subject matter somehow served as both the sign and signifier of lack of artistic talent. History has borne out as fools those who felt this way. Were we to make an Al Taylor, the crucial difference is that our object would lack the very generosity that fills all of Taylor's creations. This is, of course, the great irony of mimesis: the mimetic object is always a lesser thing. It approximates the thing yet never gets at what makes it special in the first place—something is always amiss. Now, all of this might not matter. An object is an object, though when dealing with an artist as particular and idiosyncratic as Taylor, it is

bove: Al Taylor.

the magic, as Ernst Fischer called it, which emanates from the objects we encounter that make them art. With Taylor the intimacy of the parts and how they relate to the whole is everything. His work, to return to Dewey, is, in and of itself, a completed act, because "the act itself is exactly *what* it is because of *how* it is done."

We find Taylor, then, in that most interesting of situations, the artist who is not hemmed in by some theory or bland morality. The things he made are merely things, objects of creation, nothing more. But I use the word "merely" with the utmost respect because it is unfair of us to ask art to be something transcendent. So often we expect art to be bigger than the world we inhabit. Art must alert us to some profound truth. We think of Francisco Goya and Théodore Géricault . We want grand visions. So we run to artists who offer themselves in this way, who tell us they will open our eyes (I am thinking here of the repugnant Thomas Hirschhorn). We must be wary of false idols, they come laden with duct tape and cardboard, but neither can patch the holes in this world forever. Al Taylor understood that to *merely* make an object was not to engage in some sort of lesser act. Courageous and tragic thinkers, like Friedrich Hölderlin and Novalis, knew that sometimes objects are enough to help us navigate our way through the wilds of this world, that they allow us to discover ourselves. We can root ourselves in relation to the things we encounter. There is truth in objects, just as there is truth in painting. The inherent physicality of the objects' existence alerts us to our own. Never do we get the sense with Taylor that art was some moralizing labor, a clarion call to social angst. Instead we find him at play, his art fantastically alive.

I am reminded of George Santayana who, like Dewey, wanted to take art out of the temple and bring it into the everyday. Santayana sought not to remove aesthetics from the idealist longings of the Platonists. He believed the poetry of Plato's language and ideas really does allow us to understand our experience of art, what he called "the incommunicable and illusive excellence." Nevertheless, Santayana did want to increase our knowledge of the beautiful. His goal was to know *how* we become sensitive to, and come to, value beauty. The cultivation of our sensibility, if we were not already too cultivated, Santayana would leave to the poets. When I think about Al Taylor I think about the process of becoming sensitive to art and the beautiful, of knowing and placing value on beauty. It may not be the immediately available beauty we accord to a Cezanne or Rodin, but it is a beauty nonetheless.



Al Taylor's very importance is that for all the art in the world that we see and think: we could never draw that well or form steel with such facility; Taylor's work presents us with a sense of ease and life. "We no longer mean by work all that is done usefully, but only what is done unwillingly and by the spur of necessity," Santayana wrote. "By play we are designating, no longer what is done fruitlessly, but whatever is done spontaneously and for its own sake, whether it have or not an ulterior utility. Play, in this sense, may be our most useful occupation." This is where we find Taylor: the art is spontaneous and alive. Those strange drawings and sculptures were not done fruitlessly or for cultivation. They were made merely for the act of making. Taylor played. He played neither out of whimsy, nor quirkiness. He played because, as Santayana rightly pointed out over a century ago, play is our most useful occupation. It is a shame Al Taylor could not have played longer. Ⓐ

book REVIEW

Revolution Revisited

- *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution*. By David Harvey (Verso, 2012, 187pp)
- *Democracy at Work: A Cure for Capitalism*. By Richard Wolff (Haymarket Books, 2012, 201pp)

JAMES D. HOFF

> "The Party of Wall Street has had its day, and has failed miserably. The construction of an alternative on its ruins is both an opportunity and an inescapable obligation that none of us can or would ever want to avoid."
>
> —David Harvey, *Rebel Cities*

> "Overcoming the crises that are endemic to capitalism requires changing more than the form of capitalism. It requires changing the internal organization of capitalist production itself." —Richard Wolff, *Democracy at Work*

In some ways it already seems like another time. The crowds are gone, the library destroyed, the hand-made signs and banners trashed or stored away. Zucotti Park is empty, occupied only by a handful of police officers who continue to anxiously patrol the sunken plaza at the feet of the new Freedom Tower. Just a year ago, Occupy Wall Street was brimming with possibility; today the movement seems to have moved on from itself, branching off into a collection of more focused, but seemingly less ambitious movements and organizations. All that remained of the once glorious occupation were a handful of diehards left over from the first anniversary gathering—camped out in front of Trinity Church—who no doubt have been washed away by the hurricane winds and rain that have menaced the city. This is the world that Slovenian philosopher and intellectual troublemaker Slavoj Žižek warned against when he came to speak at Zucotti Park on October 9, 2011. "The only thing I'm afraid of," said Žižek:

> "is that we will someday just go home and then we will meet once a year, drinking beer, and nostalgically remembering what a nice time we had here. Promise yourselves that this will not be the case. We know that people often desire something but do not really want it. Don't be afraid to really want what you desire."

Precisely what that desire was (economic equality? human dignity? an end to capitalism?) and how it will manifest itself again, remains to be seen. What is clear, however, is that Occupy opened up a popular and very public space, where critique of capitalism and the discussion of alternatives are once again possible. The intellectual hegemony of capitalism as the only right way of life is over. "Remember, our basic message is 'we are allowed to think about alternatives,'" said Žižek. "But there is a long road ahead. There are truly difficult questions that confront us. We know what we do not want. But what *do* we want? What social organization can replace capitalism? What type of new leaders do we want?"

This difficult, in many ways impossible, question, "What does the Left want?" has been taken up by a number of leftist intellectuals. Two of the most salient and certainly most accessible responses to this question are Richard Wolff's *Democracy at Work: A Cure for Capitalism*, and David Harvey's *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution*. Neither book is coming out of the Occupy movement—Harvey and Wolff are respected professors, after all, not activists. But, as their subtitles indicate, both authors are tapping into the radical sense of possibility that Occupy—in response to the crisis of capitalism—has made manifest. Although neither spends much time analyzing the Occupy movement, both look to it as representative of specific revolutionary tendencies. For each, OWS represents a different way of thinking and organizing from the ground up. In the case of Harvey's *Rebel Cities*, the Occupy movement (following the Arab uprisings) was a tentative first step toward the political reclamation of public space. "The current wave of youth-led movements throughout the world, from Cairo to Madrid to Santiago—to say nothing of a street revolt in London followed by an 'Occupy Wall Street' movement that began in New York City before spreading to innumerable cities in the United States and now around the world—suggests there is something in the city air struggling to be expressed." For Wolff, Occupy represented not only a much needed political attack upon the traders and speculators on Wall Street, but a new found sense of hope for the Left. "The Occupy movement broke through decades of left resignation about the possibility and potential mass support for challenging the resurgence of private capitalism."

Although both books provide sweeping condemnations of global capitalism, they also offer refreshingly specific suggestions for how to begin to overthrow, or at least undermine, the dominance of that economic system. *Democracy at Work*, for instance, proposes a method for radically democratizing and liberating the workplace from the control of capital. *Rebel Cities*, meanwhile, argues that the only way to subvert capitalism's unique ability to

continually transform and adapt itself, often subsuming its own critics in the process, is to capture (much in the spirit, if not the fact, of the Paris Commune) the very spaces of capitalism's power: the urban centers of production and consumption.

Wolff's *Democracy at Work* makes a strong case for a renewed focus on the revolutionary potential of worker-controlled enterprises. For Wolff, any liberatory response to the crisis of capitalism must be truly democratic and include a clear program for regaining control of the surplus wealth created by labor. Though grounded in Marx's theory of surplus appropriation, such a program is not only about economic justice; it is also about social well-being. That is, the goal for Wolff is not just greater income equality and fairer distribution of wealth, but also greater democratic control over all aspects of our lives. Indeed, Wolff sees such worker-controlled enterprises as not only an immediate way to begin to undermine the foundations of capitalism, but as the very completion of "modern society's limited democratization."

Like many books of its kind, *Democracy at Work* is divided into three parts: introduction, analysis of the problem, and solution. The first half of the book effectively, and at times quite ingeniously, illustrates the failure of both private and state-run forms of capitalism (with special attention given to the 2007 housing market crisis) while the second half proposes a solution to the endemic crashes of free market capitalism through the creation of what Wolff calls Workers' Self Directed Enterprises (WSDEs). Toward this end, *Democracy at Work* is an intentionally accessible book aimed at a wide audience, and while little of Wolff's critique of capitalism is especially original, the simplicity and lucidity of the argument more than make up for the lack of theoretical or academic rigor. Indeed, despite the deceptively simple prose, there is real knowledge and insight to be gleaned from the first chapters, even for those well versed in the subject of capitalist crisis. Most insightful, perhaps, is Wolff's crystalline discussion of the systemic similarities between what he calls private and state-run forms of capitalism. One of the greatest failures of twentieth century manifestations of so-called socialism is that they largely continued to mimic capitalist forms of production at a state level. Indeed, the very concept of socialism itself has become intractably linked, argues Wolff, to the idea of state-regulated capitalism.

> Soviet socialism—and increasingly socialism in general—came to be redefined in terms of what actually existed inside Soviet industrial enterprises. There, hired workers produced surpluses that were appropriated and distributed by others: the council of ministers, state officials who functioned as employers. Thus Soviet industry was actually an example of state capitalism in its class structure. However, by describing itself increasingly as socialist, it prompted the redefinition of socialism to mean state capitalism.

The solution to this dilemma is to recognize the fact that both private and state-run forms of capitalism are exploitative and that the only way to circumvent such exploitation is to directly democratize control of the surplus wealth generated by labor.

This brings us to the idea of WSDEs. Though Wolff does not advocate in favor of any one form of worker-controlled enterprise, he spends nearly seventy pages detailing the ways in which such enterprises, if properly conceived, would be both economically and socially superior to capitalism. In fact, this defense of WSDEs is perhaps the most original contribution of the book, and Wolff does a fine job of countering some of the most pernicious critiques of cooperative enterprises. WSDEs, Wolff argues, would face some of the same challenges as corporate or privately owned enterprises. However, because of their democratic and political nature, they would be uniquely situated to more effectively and creatively respond to those issues. The problem of layoffs, for instance, which has plagued American labor for decades, could be reduced and ameliorated by the creation of a government administered fund to support workers at full pay while helping them find work within the larger system of WSDEs. Furthermore, since decisions about such issues as layoffs would be decided directly by the workers themselves, and all of the collateral damage of such decisions taken into account, layoffs would occur less frequently and in far smaller numbers.

This ability to do what's right for the worker is what makes WSDEs strong, and potentially quite popular. It might, however, also be their greatest weakness. While WSDEs would be constrained by virtue of the democratic process from maximizing profit by reducing safety standards, cutting labor costs, speeding up production, or outsourcing, private and corporate-owned enterprises would still function with the same kind of ruthless ingenuity they do now. Wolff's response to such a critique is two-fold: first he argues that WSDEs would, like corporations, eventually be able to influence and affect public policy in much the same way that corporations do, securing tax breaks and subsidies that would make them able to compete on an even playing field. More powerfully, WSDEs and the workers who own them, would be able to make real sacrifices that other workers would not and thereby potentially gain significant strategic advantages. When a privately owned company reduces wages in order to reinvest, there is no guarantee that future profits will be distributed back to the workers. In a WSDE, however, "the workers who collectively lowered their individual wages would be the

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HARLEM MOSAICS

A NOVEL ABOUT THE HARLEM RENAISSANCE

BY WHIT FRAZIER

Harlem Mosaics tells the story of Langston Hughes & Zora Neale Hurston, two of Black literature's finest writers during the first wave of an authentic Black Arts Movement.

With an Introduction By Marc Primus, of the Afro-American Folkloric Troupe, who knew and produced the works of both Langston Hughes and Zora Neale Hurston

In the summer of 1927, Zora Neale Hurston and Langston Hughes traveled through the south, resolved to revolutionize black theater with an opera that would capture all the lyricism and beauty of Black vernacular folk life.

They planned to write a play about two old friends who become adversaries.

It was a drama they would not only write together, but live to see happen between themselves.

Harlem Mosaics tells this story in lyrical prose that evokes the 1920s New York City of Langston Hughes and Zora Neale Hurston, Waldo Frank and Hart Crane.

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same workers who received and used the enlarged surplus to solve the problem. In contrast, workers in a capitalist enterprise would more likely resist such a solution since other people—the capitalists who exploit them—would receive and decide what to do with any extra surplus realized by lowering individual wages."

WSDEs then, subvert both private and state forms of capitalism, and as such offer a solution to what Wolff sees as the central problem of the Left in the twentieth century: its tendency to vacillate between reforms of private capitalism and strident calls for state control of production. Of course, Wolff recognizes that WSDEs are not a silver bullet. Like private capital, they too will face their share of hurdles and setbacks. "However, the struggles over WSDEs will differ from those over capitalist (or other exploitative) organizations of production because they will no longer involve the tensions between those people who produce and those who appropriate the surpluses."

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Like Wolff, Harvey is also concerned with how to take control of surplus. But instead of focusing only on workers and the workplace, he argues that we must expand our concept of a revolutionary class to include all exploited members of the polis, whether formally employed or not. This turn, from the factory floor to the homes and streets of the metropolis, is an important one, and it is what sets *Rebel Cities* apart from other critiques of capitalism. Considered from this new perspective, seen from the vantage point of the city street, the limits of resistance, the limits of the possible are greatly expanded.

Inspired by the work of the French philosopher and sociologist Henri Lefebvre and social uprisings in cities like Shanghai, New York, London, and El Alto, Bolivia, Harvey's *Rebel Cities* is nothing less than a call for radically reimagining what the city can and should be as a permanent locus of resistance to capitalism. Harvey's argument is grounded in an interpretation and appreciation of Lefebvre's idea of "the right to the city." This right is, as Harvey explains quite well in a 2008 piece for the *New Left Review*,

> far more than the individual liberty to access urban resources: it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city. It is, moreover, a common rather than an individual right since this transformation inevitably depends upon the exercise of a collective power to reshape the processes of urbanization. The freedom to make and remake our cities and ourselves is, I want to argue, one of the most precious yet most neglected of our human rights.

In other words, the right to the city includes not only the right to access the city's services and spaces, but to help shape it, to make it conform to our collective desires and not merely the whims, impositions, or exploitations of capital. For Harvey, this right to the city also includes a right to the wealth and value that the city generates. Just as Wolff argues that the products of a factory should be owned by those who produce them, the city should and must be owned and controlled by the people who make it.

The need for this right to the city has rarely been clearer than today, when the "creative destruction" of capitalism continues to make and remake the city in its own image, wiping out whole populations as gentrification and privatization sweep across the avenues and streets of urban centers like New York, São Paulo, Mexico City, and Berlin. Such transformations can be seen clearly in the creation of spaces like New York's Zucotti Park—a privately owned "public" square—which is also, perhaps not coincidentally, the birthplace of the global Occupy movement. For Harvey, contested spaces such as Zucotti—which was at least temporarily reclaimed by Occupy as Liberty Plaza—and the struggles they engender are potential sites of innovative resistance and urban revolution.

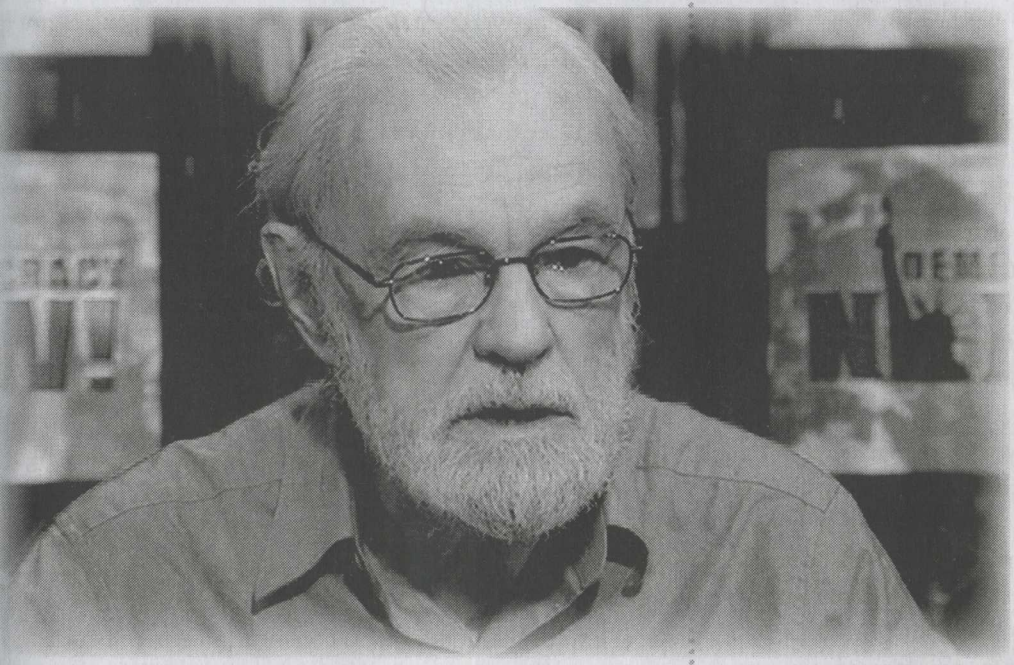
> One step, though by no means final, towards unification of these struggles is to focus sharply on those moments of creative destruction where the economy of wealth-accumulation piggy-backs violently on the economy of dispossession, and there proclaim on behalf of the dispossessed their right to the city—their right to change the world, to change life, and to reinvent the city more after their heart's desire. That collective right, as both a working slogan and a political ideal, brings us back to the age-old question of who it is that commands the inner connection between urbanization and surplus production and use.

These struggles, however, to be successful on a broader scale, to truly reshape the life of the city, must do more than merely excoriate Wall Street and call for economic reform. They must also begin to advocate for a right to the city as a model for economic and social justice.

Part of the reason why Harvey sees the right to the city as so important is that the city comprises the front lines of any serious confrontation with capitalism. The city, after all, has always been the center of capitalist wealth accumulation, exploitation, and crisis. Indeed, the current economic crisis is, in large part, rooted in this exploitation of urban conditions of life. Real estate speculators—or entrepreneurs as they like to call themselves—are, Harvey claims, largely responsible for the 2007 global housing market crash. In fact such crashes are a regular part of global capitalist urban development. As more and more people (now more than 50 percent of the world's population) live in urban centers, the land upon which those cities are built has become what Harvey calls "unreal estate," a fictitious form of capital "that derives from expectations of future rents." This speculation has not only forced out large populations from the center of such cities as London,

New York, and Mumbai, but inevitably leads to perpetual housing market crashes. "There have been hundreds of financial crises since 1973 (compared to very few prior to that), and quite a few of them have been property- or urban development-led," writes Harvey.

But property speculation is not the only form of urban exploitation. Underpinning this speculation—built into the very system of renting, lending, and property ownership—is a vast process of surplus appropriation, in which the city has, in effect, become the battlefield of a brutal war against the working class and the poor. From exorbitant rents, driven by wildly optimistic speculation, to outright property theft, the legal dimensions of predatory



mortgage lending and urban development have allowed the capitalist class to pillage urban areas such as Baltimore, Cleveland, Detroit, and Buffalo, which have become what Harvey calls "centers for a growing wave of accumulation by dispossession."

> Predatory practices that hit the poor, the vulnerable, and the already underprivileged are legion. Any small unpaid bill (a license fee or water bill, for example) can become a lien on property about which a property owner may remain mysteriously (and illegally) unnotified until after it has been bought up by a lawyer who expenses it so that an original unpaid bill of, say $100 requires, say, $2,500 to redeem. For most poor people this means the loss of the property. At the last round of lien sales in Baltimore, some $6 million worth of liens on property were purchased from the city by a small group of lawyers.

Such homes bought at auction are then frequently, indeed almost always, spruced up and "flipped" for a large profit, or simply destroyed to make way for larger, more profitable luxury housing. One need only look at the now still largely-empty luxury condominiums lining McCarren Park in Williamsburg to understand the eventual end of such adventurous speculation—commoditized neighborhoods full of empty houses. Such commoditization is, in fact, one of the most intractable and nefarious aspects of private urban development, for "those who create an interesting and stimulating everyday neighborhood life lose it to the predatory practices of the real estate entrepreneurs," whose development eventually destroys the very street life and community that made the neighborhood so appealing to them in the first place.

The ultimate goal of Harvey's book is, in part, to try to figure out a way to undermine or short circuit the process of capitalist expropriation of urban life and return the city to its inhabitants. To accomplish this, Harvey proposes a double-pronged political attack, through which the state is forced to supply more and more in the way of public goods for public purposes, along with the self-organization of whole populations to appropriate, use, and supplement those goods in ways that extend and enhance the qualities of the non-commodified reproductive and environmental commons.

One of the first steps toward building a movement actually capable of challenging capitalism's ability to continually appropriate the culture of its own critics is to recognize first that "the conception of worker control that has hitherto dominated alterative Left political thinking is problematic." Such thinking misses the important point that it is not, nor has it ever been the case, that workers are only exploited through the unfair use of their labor. As the first half of the book takes pains to show, the owners of unproductive capital, such as housing and property, in alliance with the political classes, are capable of easily taking back any gains made in the workplace. The fact that it now frequently takes two full-time workers to adequately support a family is perhaps the most salient example of how labor has historically been exploited both within and outside of the workplace. Instead, Harvey argues that we must consider reorganizing neighborhoods and cities as well as factories, to take back the surplus created by production as well as the value added by the city. Indeed, organizing factories and workplaces—as Wolff suggests—is, it turns out, much easier to do when neighborhoods are

Above: David Harvey. PHOTO: DEMOCRACY NOW!

already organized.

Harvey looks to the example of Cochabamba and El Alto, Bolivia, as models for the revolutionary potential of urban spaces. "It was in the streets and squares of Cochabamba," says Harvey,

> That a rebellion against neoliberal privatization was fought out in the famous 'Water Wars' of 2000 . . . . and it was from El Alto . . . that rebellious movements arose to force the resignation of the pro-neoliberal president, Sánchez de Lozada, in October, 2003, and to do the same to his successor, Carlos Mesa, in 2005. All of this paved the way for the national electoral victory of the progressive Evo Morales in December, 2005.

Much of the success of these rebellions depended, in part, upon the deep tradition of local democratic control in El Alto, which was exemplified by the presence of popular assemblies and neighborhood and sectorial associations, which worked together with more formal unions to organize militant acts of resistance. The bonds between these organizations and unions were especially strong, in part because of the social and "cultural solidarities" made possible by popular, locally constructed cultural activities such as "fiestas, religious festivals, dance events," etc. Though their actions were certainly motivated by larger political goals, the residents of El Alto do not only identify themselves with such politics. Instead the Alteños, as they are called, primarily identify with their city, and their resistance was in part a way of protecting and conserving what they had made.

The lesson of El Alto—which managed to resist a reactionary coup against Morales, oust two presidents from office, and toss out two powerful global corporations, all in the course of a decade—is that there is power in a city well organized. Such organization, however, to be truly successful on a global scale must be more consciously and carefully conceived. While the revolution in El Alto was the "outcome of contingent circumstances that just happened to come together, why cannot we imagine consciously building a city-wide anti-capitalist movement along such lines?"

> Imagine in New York City, for example, the revival of the now largely somnolent community boards as neighborhood assemblies with budget-allocation powers, along with a merged Right to the City Alliance and Excluded Workers Congress agitating for greater equality in incomes and access to health care and housing provision, all coupled with a revitalized local Labor Council to try to rebuild the city and the sense of citizenship and social and environmental justice out of the wreckage being wrought by neoliberal corporatist urbanization.

But, as always, the devil is in the details. How best to organize other cities, and then bring them together in solidarity, is the question Harvey urges us to consider.

And this is where *Rebel Cities* parts ways with OWS. Each Occupy encampment was fiercely independent, and many of them functioned on a model of rigorous non-hierarchical horizontality. Although different camps frequently coordinated with one another for major marches and days of action, there was no central democratic decision making body to make quick tactical decisions or even to help organize communication between encampments. Thus, once the powers that be realized that Occupy was a real threat, it was not too difficult to take out the public face of the movement one encampment at a time. In similar fashion, the Paris Commune was, with a bit more force and resilience, eventually destroyed by the state. For Harvey, such horizontality, though a virtuous goal, is not always realistic. In place of the fetishization of horizontality, Harvey argues for a nested hierarchical structure that would allow for democratic decisions to be made at larger scales. Unfortunately,

> The idea of hierarchy is anathema to many segments of the oppositional left these days. A fetishism of organizational preference (pure horizontality, for example) all too often stands in the way of exploring appropriate and effective solutions.

In other words, any urban movement must eventually come to terms with the fact that no number of local struggles will be able to succeed without coordinating amongst themselves to tackle the larger dominance of capital. "Any anti-capitalist drive mobilized through successive urban rebellions has to be consolidated at some point at a far higher scale of generality, lest, it all lapse back at the state level into parliamentary and constitutional neoliberalism within the interstices of continuing imperial domination."

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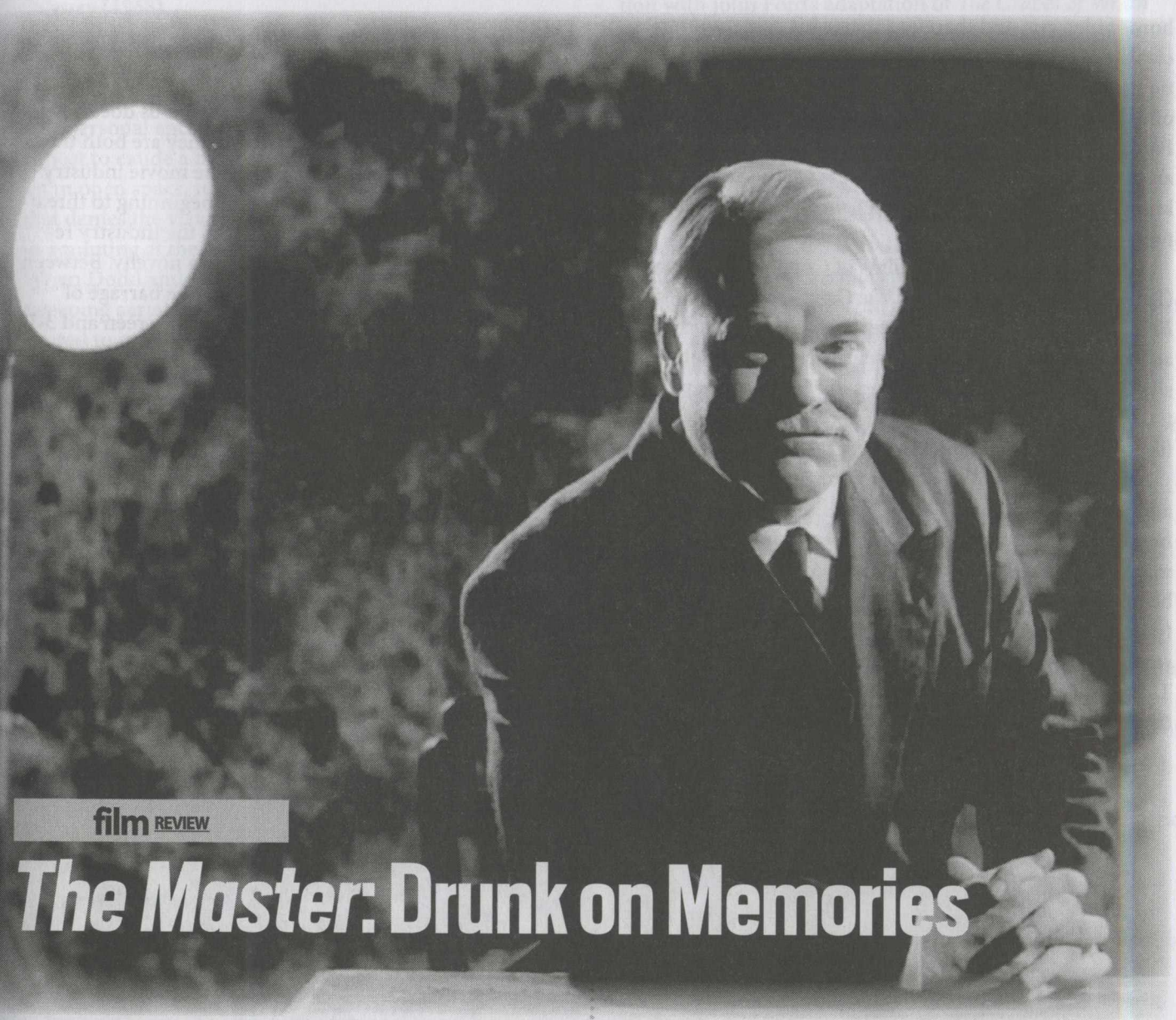
Although the encampments have been cleared, OWS and its many offshoots remain surprisingly resilient and effective. Their continued actions against foreclosure and debt, and the extraordinary response to Hurricane Sandy suggest that, though the name may change, we have not seen the last of this movement. Indeed, if such actions are any indication of its future direction, OWS could very well play an important role in helping to build the kinds of democratic community structures central to challenging capitalism. But any movement capable of revolutionary change must at some point move beyond merely ameliorative local actions, accept the hard fact that it is capitalism and not greedy bankers, corrupt politicians, or corporate CEOs that are to blame for our current crisis, and—as Harvey and Wolff both urge—begin to take back control of our neighborhoods and our workplaces. Toward that end, both books offer a solid foundation for such a struggle. Ⓐ



film REVIEW

The Master: Drunk on Memories

▶ *The Master*. Written and directed by Paul Thomas Anderson. Starring Philip Seymour Hoffman, Joaquin Phoenix.

MIKE PHILLIPS

The Master, Paul Thomas Anderson's eagerly awaited follow-up to his 2007 masterpiece, *There Will Be Blood*, has left many viewers perplexed. Everyone from the guys in my Prospect Park touch football team to veteran critics like Roger Ebert and Leonard Maltin have expressed varying levels of exasperation at the film's meandering plot and its lack of narrative closure.

In part, this frustration has to do with the early reports that the film would be an exposé of the early days of Scientology, which it is not. While Lancaster Dodd (Philip Seymour Hoffman) bears a striking resemblance to L. Ron Hubbard both physically and theologically, the film is really about his relationship with Freddie Quell (Joaquin Phoenix), a World War Two veteran who drowns his mostly unspecified sorrows in the corrosive hooch that he mixes from hard liquor, household chemicals, and prescription pills.

Like several of Anderson's previous films, *The Master* revolves around a mentor and protégé whose festering antagonism is tempered by mutual fascination and emotional interdependency. Both are irreparably damaged but determined to transcend their wounds, even if their avenues for healing (here, substance abuse and mysticism) are hopelessly twisted.

This fractured humanism is especially powerful in contrast to the strategies of Anderson's contemporaries, whose films are populated with twee caricatures (Wes Anderson) or grotesque mannequins (Harmony Korine). It is even further removed from the baroque exercises of Quentin Tarantino, for whom derivativeness is the highest virtue. While Paul Thomas Anderson came of age in the

Above: Philip Seymour Hoffman stars in *The Master*. PHOTO: THE WEINSTEIN COMPANY.

home video era, and therefore shares his contemporaries' catalog of influences, he avoids such an overtly allusionistic style. His aesthetic is more akin to the first generation of American film school graduates, specifically Francis Ford Coppola and Martin Scorsese, with whom he shares an intentionally auteurist aesthetic as well as an intimate knowledge of the history of film genres and cinematic techniques.

As with some of the early films of Coppola and Scorsese (I am thinking specifically of *The Conversation* and *Raging Bull*), *The Master* is both an intensive character study and an examination of film form itself. The volatile relationship between the main characters in *The Master* is partially an allegorical examination of the demise of celluloid film at the hands of digital imaging technology.

Anderson dealt with a similar issue in *Boogie Nights*, a fictional portrait of the adult film industry's transition from film to video, a more extreme and explicit microcosm of a wider trend in the mainstream movie business during the 1980s. The effect of that change was fragmentation and alienation among film viewers as they retreated from the movie house to their living rooms. This shift is mirrored and embodied in the dissolution of the improvised family of misfits that comprises the film's porno troupe.

The plot of *The Master* admittedly does not deal with the technical questions at hand in such a straightforward manner. Yet the historical setting of the 1950s does have a striking parallel to the current period: they are both times of great uncertainty and upheaval in the movie industry. In 1950, the rise of television was just beginning to threaten Hollywood's box-office receipts, and the industry responded by once again making cinema a novelty. Between 1952 and 1955, viewers were subjected to a barrage of innovations, including the giant Cinerama screen and 3-D spectacles, both of which have recently made comebacks in modified form. This period also saw the widespread adoption of widescreen, color cinematography which has remained standard practice.

One rarely seen innovation of the 1950s is the 70mm film stock that Anderson used to shoot *The Master*. It provides the highest definition of any film format but creates distribution problems because very few movie theaters have projectors that can accommodate the larger film. It has mostly been abandoned since the collapse of the Hollywood studio system around 1970, and even before that, it was reserved for epic productions like *Ben-Hur* (1959), *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962), and *2001: A Space*

Above: Joaquin Phoenix in *The Master*. PHOTO: THE WEINSTEIN COMPANY.

Odyssey (1968).

The Master is not an epic production. While it is a historical drama, it has no grandiose set pieces or extravagant location shoots. The majority of the film concerns tense interpersonal encounters in enclosed spaces that seem almost to exude a musty odor. When the camera is finally set in open space, near the end of the film, it is a salt flat that denies the viewer any interesting landscape and leaves us squinting at the mountains far in the background. When Dodd and Freddie arrive in New York, there is no sweeping aerial shot of the Manhattan skyline, digitally altered to match 1950s photos. Ethereal digital video lacks the gravity of celluloid film, which can be touched and held.

Given these formal irregularities, it would seem that the impetus behind the decision to shoot in 70mm is a fascination with film itself. After the war, Freddie Quell becomes a photographer in a department store. The family photos he is taking are shown as if through the lens of his camera, thus becoming a part of the film itself. The extremely high definition of the 70mm film stock mimics the uncanny starkness of the primitive color processes that can still be discerned in faded pictures of our smiling parents or grandparents, still optimistic that America was entering into an interminable era of prosperity. Freddie's family photo sittings constitute the birth of artifacts, of the transformation of a transitory relationship between light and objects into a tangible, if two-dimensional, memento. When Freddie mixes his toxic elixir with darkroom chemicals, he is ingesting the potion that enacts this weird transubstantiation.

Freddie's association with nostalgia takes other forms, as well. After losing his photography job, he becomes a migrant farm worker. These scenes inevitably conjure up an association with John Ford's adaptation of *The Grapes of Wrath* (1940). When Freddie unintentionally poisons a fellow laborer with his foul brew, he is forced to run and ultimately stows away on Dodd's borrowed pleasure yacht. It later becomes clear that Dodd's extravagant lifestyle is a carefully executed charade, aided by the largesse of high-society benefactors. In this sense, Dodd embodies the veneer of prosperity that characterized 1950s American culture, while Freddie represents its repressed past (or, like the film noir of the period, suppressed violence).

Dodd is initially attracted to Freddie precisely because of the hooch in his flask, to which Dodd gradually becomes addicted. His "Cause," a manifestly fraudulent cult that promises to dredge up its followers' past lives, is unable to provide the blissful, if hazardous, intoxication to be found in Freddie's chemical spirits.

As Dodd becomes more enamored of Freddie's liquor, Freddie becomes more deeply involved in the Cause. As part of his indoctrination, Dodd forces him to pace back and forth, his eyes closed, between a sunlit window and the opposite wall, repeatedly demanding that Freddie touch each of the two surfaces and describe what he feels. Freddie insists that he feels only a window and a wall. This goes on for several days until Freddie finally stops at the window, spreads his hands on its surface, and declares that he can feel the grass in the yard, the neighboring house, the entire milieu. The room is reminiscent of a movie theatre, with the window taking the place of the projection booth and the wall standing for the screen, the surface onto which the image is projected. Of course, when viewing video on a digital device, the source of light becomes one with the screen. Dodd is attempting to convince Freddie that the window itself is reality. The wall, the screen, is simply forgotten about (though Freddie is initially not convinced that he has passed the test and heads back toward the wall once more). This scene contrasts the easily refuted reality of the filmic image with the putative authenticity ("pics or it didn't happen") of the digital image, which, ironically, is more easily manipulable.

Near the end of the film, one of Dodd's followers (played by Laura Dern) is dumbfounded by a sudden change in Dodd's theology. Rather than helping adherents to "remember" their past lives, the Cause will now lead them to "imagine" them. We have already seen that Freddie, as a photographer, was associated with the preservation of the past. Dodd at first foolishly attempts to take on a similar role but eventually realizes that he can never provide the sense of communion with the past or the euphoric state that the more simple and earthy Freddie can. Likewise, digital video lacks that uneasy kinship with the real that celluloid film provides. Ⓐ

Downtown But Not Out

- ***PRELUDE .12: at the forefront of contemporary theater, dance, and performance.*** Curated by Caleb Hammons, Helen Shaw, and Frank Hentschker. At the Martin E. Segal Theatre Center, CUNY Graduate Center, October 3–5, 2012.
- ***Natasha, Pierre & The Great Comet of 1812***. By Dave Malloy. Directed by Rachel Chavkin. At Ars Nova, October 19, 2012.
- ***How to Break***. By Aaron Jafferis and the Mixing Texts Collective. Directed by Christopher V. Edwards. At HERE, October 20, 2012.
- ***The Best of Everything***. Adapted and directed by Julie Kramer. At HERE Arts Center, October 20, 2012.

DAN VENNING

Some of the most exciting theatre in New York takes place far from the commercial stages of Broadway. Off-off Broadway theatres—venues with fewer than one hundred seats—all stage experimental shows aimed at more limited audiences. Frequently called "downtown theatre," Off-off Broadway tends to cater to a younger, hipper crowed than Broadway and Off-Broadway theatres. These shows can be "experimental" in a variety of ways: by playing with form and genre, telling stories less likely to appeal to mass audiences, or presenting the works of emerging artists or those whose style clashes with the mainstream. Sometimes, downtown theatre can unfortunately seem unfinished or unprofessional, but at other times one feels especially lucky to be among the few New Yorkers who got to see a true gem. This month, I saw a variety of productions that were part of this experimental scene, starting with the annual PRELUDE festival at the Martin E. Segal Theatre Center at the Graduate Center, and then at shows at Ars Nova and HERE.

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This year marked the ninth annual PRELUDE festival, a showcase of installations, workshops, panels, and performances which serves as a preview of the off-off Broadway season. Because of the nature of the event, much of the PRELUDE festival consists of works-in-progress. PRELUDE's curators Caleb Hammons (the producer at Soho Rep), Helen Shaw (a critic and professor at NYU), and Frank Hentschker (executive director of the Martin E. Segal Theatre Center) divided the festival into four themes: "Manifestos 2012," "The Future of the Cinema is the Stage," "Imitation of Participation," and "The Return of the Singspiel." I was able to attend three events at PRELUDE: Heidi Schreck and Ken Rus Schmoll's *What the Constitution Means to Me*, Niegel Smith's *Eat Me, Drink Me, Homo*, and "The Return of the Singspiel," a showcase of selections from new musicals currently in development.

Heidi Schreck is an actor and playwright who has won multiple Obie and Drama Desk awards, and I was excited to see her collaboration with Obie-winning director Ken Russ Schmoll. At PRELUDE, they presented a short piece of *What the Constitution Means to Me*, a satirical memoir in which Schreck reenacts her high school experience touring the country to give speeches about the Constitution of the United States in order to win scholarships. As she compares the Constitution to a crucible (as opposed to her unseen rival, who employs the metaphor of a patchwork quilt), the present-day Schreck uses her past self to not-so-subtly critique the ideology of ultraconservative groups such as the Tea Party, which use their interpretations of the Constitution to justify beliefs. Through the performance, Schreck shows how, by catering to such people while giving speeches in high school, she earned the money to go to college and critique them as a mature artist. Her performance thus becomes doubly subversive. According to Schreck and Schmoll, the selection from *What the Constitution Means to Me* is part of a much longer project currently in development.

I had not heard of Niegel Smith before signing up for his interactive tour performance *Eat Me, Drink Me, Homo*, but I was intrigued by the event's description. The performance was limited to six audience members, and would take place over an hour-and-a-half walk through the city. The walk started at the Graduate Center and eventually progressed to Madison Square Park. The group was met in the Graduate Center lobby by a "caretaker" in a brown robe, Jason Zeren. Zeren slowly led us to the stairs outside the library on 34th Street, where Smith met us. Wearing all white, Smith asked us to trust him as he led us on a slow walk through the city, in single file. He had us invent our own ritualistic gestures and phrases to repeat as we walked. As we did so, we were able to see the city in a new way. Upon reaching Madison Square Garden, Smith, having established our trust, reenacted the Last Supper using his own body as a table—we took small wafers from him and ate them. Then Smith startlingly broke our trust, urging us to touch him in sexually inappropriate ways. At this point, Zeren stepped in to protect the participants,

demanding that we shame Smith. In a pseudo-crucifixion, our group then dragged Smith, who was ranting profanities, over to a pond, where we were all "absolved." The performance ended with a calm talkback between Smith and Zeren, now out of character, and the audience/participants. Smith's walk (one of many he has created; descriptions for more can be found at http://niegelsmith.com/walks) was striking in its ability to both recreate religious ritual and startlingly demonstrate within an hour-and-a-half—on an experiential level—some of the emotional effects of being betrayed by a trusted authority figure. During the talkback, Smith shared how he had been partially inspired to create the show by Malcolm Gladwell's *New Yorker* article "In Plain View," about Jerry Sandusky and how predators often insinuate themselves into communities as trusted mentors.

The hour-and-a-half "Return of the Singspiel" showcase consisted of selections and musical numbers from five new musicals. Eliza Bent and Dave Malloy's *Black Wizard/Blue Wizard*, in development for a June 2013 premiere at the Incubator Arts Project, was a multimedia hip-hop musical duel between two technological wizards: Bent performed in the theatre, and Malloy appeared via video. *The House of Von Macrame*, a musical with a book by Joshua Conkel, music and lyrics by Matt Marks, and directed by Nick Leavens, slated for a January 2013 premiere at the Bushwick Star, was a campy pop horror musical, in the spirit of *Rocky Horror*, but set in the world of high fashion. Corey Dargel's *The Three Christs* was a musical set in a mental institution where the protagonists included three patients who all believed themselves to be Jesus, and had been put together as an attempt at therapy. Kristine Haruna Lee's *War Lesbian*, framed as part of an episode of *The Ellen DeGeneres Show*, told the story of a cannibalistic lesbian whose fingers were chopped off by her father. Tony Torn's *Ubu Sings Ubu* was a mash-up of Alfred Jarry's 1896 play *Ubu Roi*, a precursor to the Absurdist and Surrealist movements, with the music of the 1970s art-punk band Pere Ubu. The "Singspiel" selections varied significantly stylistically and most felt unfinished, but there were mo-

Above: Lucas Steele, Nick Choksi, and Paul Pinto in *Natasha, Pierre....* PHOTO: BEN ARONS

ments of brilliance: Torn's fifteen-minute *Ubu Sings Ubu* was, appropriately, the most dementedly profane staging of Jarry's play I can imagine, and the first two scenes from *The House of Von Macrame* were musically and dramatically fun enough to get me eagerly looking forward to its January premiere.

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Natasha, Pierre & the Great Comet of 1812 was billed as an "Electro-Pop Opera." The Composer-in-Residence at Ars Nova, Dave Malloy (who also co-created *Black Wizard/Blue Wizard* at PRELUDE), composed the music and adapted the libretto from sections of Tolstoy's *War and Peace*. Malloy also serves as Music Director, plays various instruments, and performs the lead role of Pierre.

Malloy's opera is unconventional in many senses. Malloy says he takes his inspiration both from the operatic form and pop electronic music such as the work of Radiohead and Björk, but he also infuses his music with melodies that seem at times to come straight from nineteenth-century Russia, blending polka, punk, and folk rock much like bands such as Gogol Bordello. As staged

by Rachel Chavkin, the Obie-winning Founding Artistic Director of The TEAM, *Natasha, Pierre* takes place among and around audience members who are seated closely together around tables and at a bar in a theatre converted to look like a nineteenth-century Russian supper club. (Mimi Lien's set is modeled after an actual supper club Malloy visited in Russia two years ago). Audience members are served potato dumplings and traditional Russian bread, as well as complimentary vodka. In these respects, *Natasha, Pierre* seems like the model of interactive downtown theatre. But Malloy's aesthetics are grounded in musical and technical mastery: his work, two hours and ten minutes of continuous music for singers and six to ten instruments, is every bit as much an opera as works staged at the Met. It is a magnificent opus, and little surprise that the show received glowing notices in *The New York Times* and other papers; when it extended, the added performances sold out in two hours.

The show requires no familiarity with *War and Peace*: the program includes a synopsis, a chart showing the characters and their interconnections, and the opening number, "Prologue," is used to introduce the audience to the characters and their defining characteristics. Yet for those who have read and remember the novel, Malloy and Chavkin have included small "Easter eggs"—moments that allude to some of the many elements of Tolstoy's novel not included in Malloy's opera. *Natasha, Pierre*, in fact, consciously jettisons the "War" part of its source material. The opening song includes lyrics that acknowledge that "There's a war going on out there . . . and Andrey [one of the main characters in Tolstoy's novel] isn't here." Despite his central role in the book, Andrey barely appears in the opera, his name invoked by all the characters as the specter of an absent friend, brother, fiancé, and son.

The title *Natasha, Pierre* is indeed appropriate: the first half of the opera deals with the life of Natasha (Phillipa Soo), Andrey's fiancée, when she moves to Moscow, while the second half focuses on Pierre (Malloy), Andrey's best friend. While Andrey is off fighting in the war, Natasha falls for the charming Anatole (Lucas Steele), who is secretly already married. They attempt to elope, but their plot is foiled by Natasha's godmother (Amelia Workman). Pierre appears only peripherally in the first half, but takes center stage in the second half of the show, proving himself to be invaluable to his friends as he sets things right, as best as possible, for Andrey, Natasha, and Anatole.

The acting and singing are strong all around, but particular praise is due to Gray, who is alluring yet still emotionally affecting as Hélène, a representative of the moral depravity of Moscow, and Steele, whose chiseled good looks and angelic singing voice make clear why Natasha falls for

Above: Roberta Burke in *How to Break*. PHOTO: BENJAMIN HELLER

him. The slightly schlubby Malloy is perfect for the role of Pierre, and his singing voice, although more reminiscent of Tom Waits than traditional musical theatre or opera, fits wonderfully within the show's musical stylstics. Malloy's music truly rocks, but some songs, such as the "Prologue" and "The Private and Intimate Life of the House," a duet between Andrey's sister Mary (Gelsey Bell) and father Bolkonsky (Blake DeLong) particularly stand out. The performances and immersive set are complemented by Paloma Young's beautiful costumes, a mix of period and contemporary. Bradley King's clever and eccentric lighting design, featuring chandeliers with light bulbs fanning out like solar systems, seem a fusion of nineteenth-century, steampunk, and Googie design, and make for a particularly moving conclusion as one of the lights becomes the great comet of the title. *Natasha, Pierre & the Great Comet of 1812* is a triumph of downtown theatre.

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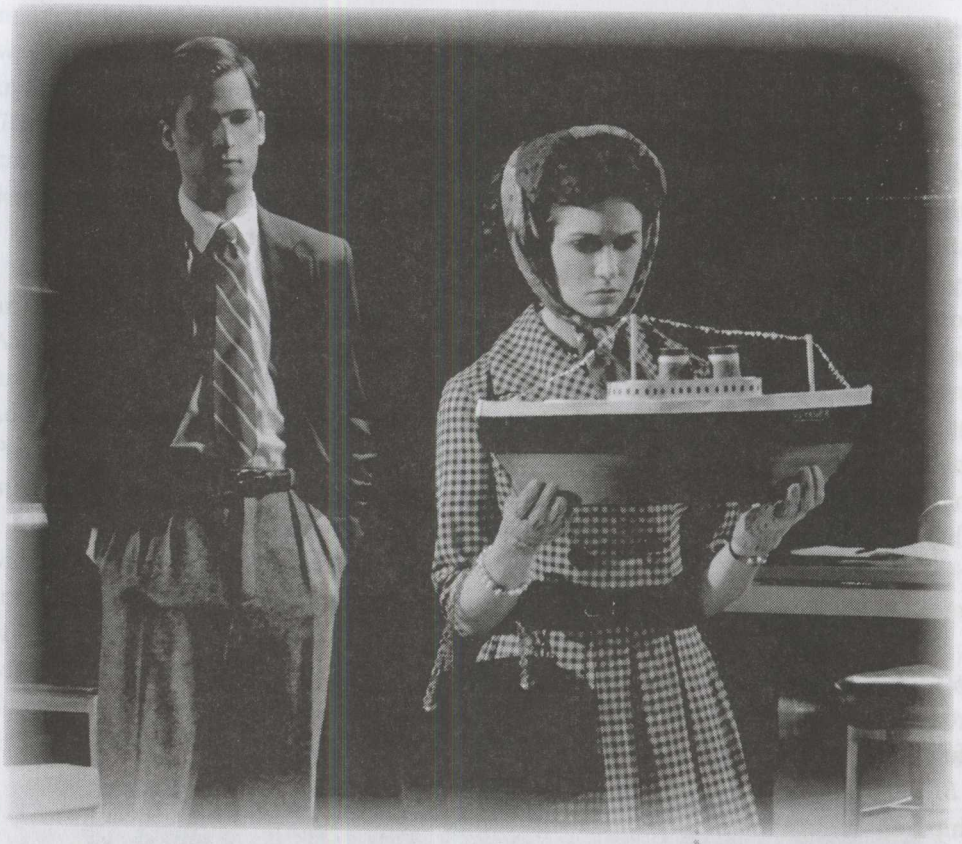
The two shows I saw at HERE—*How to Break* and *The Best of Everything*—both lacked the broad appeal of *Natasha, Pierre* and neither was as successful. Still, they were interesting in their own ways. *How to Break* was also a musical work, this one in the style of hip hop. Set in a hospital, the play concerns two teenage patients, Ana (Amber Williams) and Joel (Pedro Morillo). Ana is a popper and aspiring graphic designer in treatment for leukemia. Joel is a rapper and break dancer suffering from sickle cell anemia. They're both treated by the same pediatric hematologist, Aden (Dan Domingues), as well as the same music therapist, Maddy (Roberta Burke). Williams and Morillo are extremely talented dancers, and ably executed the complex and emotionally charged choreography by Kwikstep and Rokafella. They were aided by Adam Matta and Yakko 440's beat-box score, which grounded the show in a concrete architecture of sound; Yakko also did double duty acting as a beat-boxing nurse. Nick Vaughan's set design was extremely simplistic: a gurney, a few props, an IV pole, and green hospital curtains were all that adorned HERE's downstairs black-box theatre. But Vaughan's set proved an effective background for the play's action, and for Dave Tennent and Kate Freer's beautiful video designs: whenever Ana drew in her notebook, her designs would be projected in video graffiti onto the hospital curtains and walls.

Aaron Jafferis's lyrics were effective, but his book was another matter altogether. The story was contrived: from the beginning, I could tell that *How to Break* would melodramatically manipulate its audience's emotions (while tritely conveying the reality of sickness) by having one of the teenagers die at the end. While the tragic budding romance between Ana and Joel was cute and heartwarming, the parallel romance between Aden and Maddy seemed forced and was dropped, entirely unresolved, at the end. As a text, *How to Break* felt a bit more like therapy than theatre. There is little surprise in this: in his program note, Jafferis describes his actual work as an art and music therapist at the Yale-New Haven Children's Hospital's Arts for Healing program. *How to Break* brought the vitality of hip hop into the world of musical theatre, but Jafferis failed to distill his therapeutic work into a dramatic text.

Immediately after seeing *How to Break*, I went to HERE's upstairs space to see *The Best of Everything*, Julie Kramer's adaptation of Rona Jaffe's 1958 novel of the same title. Set in the typing pool and offices of a New York publishing house from 1952 to 1954, *The Best of Everything* follows the rise of Caroline (Sarah Wilson) from secretary to editor after she is abandoned by her fiancé Eddie (Jordan Geiger). Despite her meteoric rise, Caroline makes enduring friendships with her fellow secretaries Brenda (Sas Goldberg), Mary Agnes (Molly Lloyd), April (Alicia Sable), and Gregg (Hayley Treider). She quickly realizes that women need to stick together in a world where men wield all the power.

The Best of Everything was, for the most part, simply staged with period costumes designed by Daniel Urlie and a set (consisting of a few platforms, tables, chairs, and telephones) by Lauren Helpern. The music similarly consisted of period hits by artists such as Doris Day and Rosemary Clooney. The aesthetic similarity between *The Best of Everything* and *Mad Men* was apparent throughout—some of the songs, such as Clooney's "Botch-A-Me (Ba-Ba-Baciami Piccina)" (1952), have also appeared on the score for AMC's television series—but here the focus was different, centered not on the philandering, self-important men, but on the women who each struggle in their own way with male authority. (*Mad Men*'s creator Matthew Weiner has acknowledged his debt to Jaffe's novel, and at one point in the show's second season Don Draper reads the novel and discusses the 1959 film adaptation which features Joan Crawford.)

For the most part, the performances were strong. Treider was captivating as Gregg, and Tom O'Keefe—who played all the male roles save Eddie—ably created four different characters that were readily distinguishable through his shifts vocally, physically, and emotionally. Amy Wilson, who developed the show with Kramer, was particularly fine as Miss Farrow, the editor who serves as a mentor for Caroline, and whom Caroline eventually replaces (this was the role played by Crawford in the 1959 film). Unfortunately, Sarah Wilson as Caroline, while charismatic in her bright-eyed optimism, ultimately gave a performance that was neither compelling nor memo-



PRELUDE, *Natasha, Pierre & the Great Comet of 1812*, *How to Break*, and *The Best of Everything* demonstrate the variety present in New York's downtown theatre scene. Some clearly need more development to genuinely succeed in the theatre, but others were vibrant, experimental works that stand as a testament to the artistic brilliance that can be found far from the lights of Broadway. Ⓐ

PRELUDE .12: at the forefront of contemporary theater, dance, and performance (The Ninth Annual PRELUDE Festival). Curated by Caleb Hammons, Helen Shaw, and Frank Hentschker. Produced by Rachel Silverman. Administrative Direction by Rebecca Sheahan. Production Coordination by Lisa McGinn. Stage Management by Greg Redlawsk and Mary Sadoni. Technical Direction by Tim Fodness, Brad Krumholz, and Brendan Regimbal. At the Martin E. Segal Theatre Center, CUNY Graduate Center, October 3–5, 2012. Free.

Natasha, Pierre & the Great Comet of 1812. Book, lyrics, music, musical direction, and orchestrations by Dave Malloy. Directed by Rachel Chavkin. Adapted from *War and Peace* by Leo Tolstoy, primarily from Aylmer and Louise Maude's 1922 translation. Associate Music Direction by Paul Pinto. Scenic Design by Mimi Lien. Costume Design by Paloma Young. Lighting Design by Bradley King. Sound Design by Matt Hubbs. Stage Management by Trisha Henson and James Steele. Featuring: Brittain Ashford, Gelsey Bell, Nick Choksi, Blake DeLong, Amber Gray, Dave Malloy, Paul Pinto, Phillipa Soo, Lucas Steele, and Amelia Workman. Band: Brent Arnold, Mark Dover, John Murchison, Raymond Sicam III, Sally Wall, and Pinky Weitzman. At Ars Nova, October 16–November 17, 2012. Tickets: $25–45.

How to Break. By Aaron Jafferis and the Mixing Texts Collective. Created and developed by Christopher V. Edwards, Rebecca Hart, Aaron Jafferis, Kwikstep, Adam Matta, Rokafella, and Yako 440. Directed by Christopher V. Edwards. Book and lyrics by Aaron Jafferis. Beatbox score composed by Adam Matta and Yakko 440. Choreography and Hip-Hop Dramaturgy by Kwikstep and Rokafella. Songs and additional lyrics by Rebecca Hart. Vocal arrangement for "Transplant/Transfusion" by Roberta Burke. Video Design by Dave Tennent, IMA and Kate Freer, IMA. Set Design by Nick Vaughan. Lighting Design by Lucrecia Briceno. Graffiti Design by Part One. Costume Design by Arnulfo Maldonado. Assistant Costume Design by Karen Boyer. Stage management by Miriam Hyfler and Lisa McGinn. Featuring: Roberta Burke, Dan Domingues, Pedro Morillo, Amber Williams, and Yako 440. At HERE, October 18–November 4, 2012. Tickets: $10–18.

The Best of Everything. Adapted and directed by Julie Kramer. Based on the book by Rona Jaffe. Developed with Amy Wilson. Set Design by Lauen Helpern. Lighting design by Graham Kindred. Costume Design by Daniel Urlie. Sound Design by Jill BC Du Boff. Stage Management by Katharine Whitney. Featuring: Jordan Geiger, Sas Goldberg, Molly Lloyd, Tom O'Keefe, Alicia Sable, Hayley Treider, Amy Wilson, and Sarah Wilson. At HERE, 29 September—20 October 2012. Tickets: $18.

rable. Part of this problem may have been due to Kramer's script, or perhaps the source material on which it was based. While the show presented the women as individuals struggling against monolithic male authority (and reinforced this theme by casting the women with individual actors and having only two men play all the male roles), the characters in *The Best of Everything* lack complexity. They are all types. Caroline is plucky and ambitious, April is innocent and flirty, Mary Agnes and Brenda are gossips focused solely on the goal of marriage, Gregg is a neurotic firebrand, Miss Farrow is a hard-as-nails taskmaster. The characters change over the course of the show due to external circumstances (marriages, affairs, an abortion), but these transformations seemed artificial and contrived to show how, in this world, it was impossible for any of these women to have "the best of everything."

In many ways, *The Best of Everything*, staged in HERE's main theatre, was more conventional than most downtown theatre. It was a text-based show with an important message: women have to band together to advance in the world. In this respect, the show perhaps has more similarities to than differences from recent popular series such as *Sex and the City* or *Girls*. In an age when Republican Presidential candidates explicitly oppose equality for women in the workplace (while claiming to have "binders full of women"), the show is also obviously still relevant. But without a fully developed script and characters the message fails to be fully conveyed.

Above: Jordan Geiger & Sarah Wilson in *The Best of Everything*. PHOTO: LEAH MICHALOS

Of Health, Wellness, and Websites

The DSC is excited to launch a listserv for all Graduate Center students this month. We hope that the DSC listserv will help students converse and exchange information across programs. To subscribe, send an email to Anne Donlon, the Co-Chair for Communications: ccc@cunydsc.org.

At the October plenary meeting, we formed two ad hoc committees. The ad hoc website committee will recommend improvements to the revamped DSC website (cunydsc.org). The ad hoc committee on health services will evaluate the services available to GC students, particularly those funded by our Student Fees. Plenary also voted to revise a bylaw, changing the stipend for the University Faculty Liaison to be equal to the University Student Senate Delegate, one-half of a Grad B Fellowship. Chief Librarian Polly Thistlethwaite was our guest; she spoke about the open access movement as a response to the exorbitant cost of serial subscriptions. She chairs the University Faculty Senate Open Access Group, a committee formed with librarians, faculty, and the creators of the CUNY Academic Commons. The committee is interested in creating an open access Institutional Repository for CUNY. Polly also presented resources available in the library's subject guide on Open Access Publishing which may be accessed at http://libguides.gc.cuny.edu/openaccess.

The DSC continues to be interested in hearing about student representation on program standing committees. Each program should have students on each of the standing committees, according to the CUNY bylaws: "The students of each doctoral program shall have responsibility through student representatives to the executive committee and the standing committees to make known their views on the policies of the program" (9.4.d). We've heard from students in various programs that faculty don't let them stay in the meetings, or they are told the meetings are confidential, or the committees don't meet. We'll have a presentation on student representation on program standing committees at our next plenary meeting, November 16, 6:00 p.m., in room 5414.

Keep an eye out for a Graduate Center Town Hall happening later in November, hosted by the Doctoral Students' Council and the Adjunct Project.

Provost Chase Robinson responded to a suggestion from the DSC to hold an open meeting for students. He has invited students with questions and concerns to drop by his first "Office Hours," which will be held on November 29, from 4:00–5:00 p.m. in the Provost's Conference Room, which is located inside room 8113.

Finally, Monique Whitaker, Officer for Health and Wellness encourages students to visit the Health & Wellness blog, opencuny.org/healthdsc. Students can consult the blog for information on what to do if they have problems with NYSHIP or other health insurance, or if they don't have insurance, as well as to find links to disability services and info and other health resources at the Graduate Center, CUNY more broadly, and beyond.

As always, contact DSC officers during their office hours in room 5495, by email (dsc@cunydsc.org), on Twitter (@cunydsc), or on Facebook (/cunydsc). Our remaining plenary meetings for the semester will take place November 16 and December 14. The December meeting will be followed by a party, open to all Graduate Center students. Ⓐ